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CHINA DAILY

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President hails strong ties with Eritrea

Countries urged to boost cooperation, common growth

By XU WEI
xuwei@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping and visiting Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki wave to children during a welcoming ceremony before their talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Monday. WANG YE / XINHUA

President Xi Jinping underlined on Monday China's readiness to explore cooperation with Eritrea in infrastructure development, telecommunications, agriculture, mining and fisheries as part of broader steps to promote win-win cooperation and common development.

In talks with visiting Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki in Beijing, Xi reaffirmed Beijing's commitment to supporting the African nation in safeguarding its sovereignty, security and development interests and opposing foreign interference in its internal affairs and imposition of unilateral sanctions.

China will encourage more businesses to invest in Eritrea and continue with aid programs, including sending medical teams and agricultural experts, he told Isaias, who started his state visit to China on Sunday.

Before their talks, a red carpet was rolled out for the Eritrean president during a ceremony that also included a 21-gun salute and a guard of honor.

Isaias' visit to China came ahead of the 30th anniversary of the two nations' establishment of diplomatic ties on May 24.

Xi noted that both nations have always trusted and supported each other over the past three decades, and Beijing, as a trustworthy friend of Eritrea, has always viewed and developed bilateral ties from a strategic and long-term perspective.

In an international landscape full of instability and uncertainties, ensuring the sound growth of ties between China and Eritrea is not only in keeping with the common and long-term interests of both nations, but is also instrumental to safeguarding regional peace and international fairness and justice, he said.

Xi underscored China's readiness to deepen the bilateral friendship, both as friends and comrades, and take the bilateral strategic partnership to a new level.

China is willing to conduct exchanges with Eritrea on experiences in state governance, and support each other in jointly opposing unilateralism and hegemonic acts in order to uphold the common interests of both nations and those of developing countries, he said.

He called on both nations to jointly utilize frameworks and platforms such as the joint building of the Belt and Road, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa, in advancing win-win cooperation.

Xi expressed appreciation for Eritrea's support of China's efforts to evacuate its citizens from Sudan, which he said spoke volumes for the strong bond of friendship between the two nations.

The two nations should adopt more measures to strengthen people-to-people exchanges, he added.

Xi expounded on the need for China and Africa to build up their solidarity and tackle challenges of the times under the new circumstances, saying that mutual respect, understanding, support and help will forever be the focus of China-Africa friendship.

He noted that Africa is "a land full of hope", adding that cooperation between China and Africa plays an important role in guiding South-South cooperation and international cooperation with the continent.

He reaffirmed China's resolve to work with African nations to carry forward the traditional friendship, consolidate strategic mutual trust and provide new opportunities for Africa, as China moves forward with high-quality growth and follows its own path to modernization.

The two sides should further deepen and firm up pragmatic cooperation and promote the building of an even closer China-Africa community with a shared future, Xi said.

Isaias emotionally recalled his special attachment to China over the past 50-plus years, saying that his people will never forget the precious support from China in their efforts to win independence and liberation.

China is a great country and any attempt to contain China's development is doomed to failure, he said.

He appealed for stronger cooperation between the two countries and expressed belief that the bilateral strategic partnership will help Eritrea achieve economic and social development.

Premier Li Qiang also held talks with Isaias on Monday.

Trade between China and Eritrea grew by 32.2 percent year-on-year to $610 million in 2022, with China mainly exporting electronic and mechanical products and importing copper ore and leather products from the African nation.

Xi calls for strengthening friendship with Central Asia

By MO JINGXI
mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping has encouraged young people from Central Asian countries who are studying in China to be devoted to promoting China-Central Asia friendship and to make greater contributions to bolstering relations between China and their home countries.

In a letter of reply to students from Central Asian countries at China University of Petroleum-Beijing that was published on Monday, Xi said that China and Central Asian countries, which are linked by mountains and waters, enjoy a profound friendship and a shared future.

Xi said that since 2013, when he initiated jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt, the China-Central Asia relations have constantly improved, with accelerated cooperation in all fields that benefit people of both sides.

The friendship between China and Central Asian countries needs to be carried forward by ambitious and promising young people from generation to generation, he said, adding that the students are not only witnesses to and beneficiaries of Sino-Central Asian ties, but they also help boost the relations.

Xi expressed his hope that the students will be devoted to the cause of China-Central Asia friendship, carry forward the "Silk Road spirit" and tell the stories of China and Central Asian countries well.

He also called on the students to work as the "envoys of friendship" and "bridges of cooperation", and contribute to building a closer China-Central Asia community with a shared future.

Recently, the students wrote a letter to Xi and expressed their determination to study hard and strengthen cooperation to make contributions to building the China-Central Asia community with a shared future.

Collaboration with China vital for global innovations, German scientist says

By ZHANG ZHIHAO
zhangzhihao@chinadaily.com.cn

International science and technology cooperation with China is vital for pushing the boundaries of science and creating innovations and solutions to benefit human societies, a noted German scientist said.

Encouraging open and interdisciplinary collaboration and enhancing support for basic research and female scientists are conducive to China's transformation into an innovative nation, Claudia Felser, director of the Max Planck Institute for Chemical Physics of Solids, told China Daily in an exclusive interview.

Claudia Felser

This year marks the 45th anniversary of China's reform and opening-up. Having visited China over a dozen times since 2007, Felser said she has been very impressed by the country's progress in science and technology over the years, and the quantity and quality of scientific talent it has produced.

"Many of my colleagues and students in Germany are Chinese," Felser said, adding that the Max Planck Institute has had a tradition of maintaining strong academic interactions with its Chinese peers.

Reform and opening-up are significant for scientific development and international cooperation, she said.

Since 2007, she has collaborated with Chinese researchers from the Institute of Physics at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in the cutting-edge field of quantum materials, with the shared goal of creating new materials with distinctive qualities to serve the major strategic needs of countries.

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In the fast lane

Travelers pass through border inspection gates using fast-lane services at Xiaoshan International Airport in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Monday. All ports nationwide resumed fast-lane entry and exit services on Monday to facilitate cross-border travel. LONG WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

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Turkiye polls heading for historic runoff

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AI-generated songs raise concerns over infringement

By CAO YIN
caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

Singaporean singer Stefanie Sun has become a trending topic on Chinese social media platforms once again — not for a new album or concert, but for an artificial intelligence version of her voice.

In recent weeks, a series of music videos featuring Sun's "voice" has created a buzz after being uploaded on Bilibili.com, a popular Chinese video-sharing platform. Incredibly, none of the songs were sung by Sun herself, but produced by AI software.

One of them, a video of *Fa Ru Xue*, or "Hair Like Snow", in which Sun's voice was digitally inserted in place of the original Chinese singer, Jay Chou, has been viewed more than 1.6 million times on the platform since it was posted on April 14.

In addition to generating Sun's voice, the software has also replicated the voices of other famous singers including pop diva Faye Wong and Singapore's JJ Lin.

Many viewers were shocked by the AI-generated songs, commenting that it is too difficult to distinguish their idols' voices from the AI versions, with some embracing a technology that provides people with a different way to enjoy their favorite music.

However, legal professionals have expressed concerns about the possibility of rights infringements.

"Those AI-generated songs allegedly infringe upon the copyright of singers, lyricists and composers, even as some AI zealots argue that they play the songs for free just for fun," said Liu Bin, a lawyer who specializes in handling intellectual property cases at Beijing Zhongwen Law Firm.

"It's hard for the producers of AI-generated songs to explain that they didn't make the songs for profit, because uploading the videos on such a big streaming platform can legally be deemed as business behavior," he said.

Zhao Zhanling, another Beijing lawyer, said using AI to simulate a singer's voice without permission, and then mass-sharing it, meets the definition of infringement according to the Chinese Copyright Law.

See *Infringement*, page 3

BENEFITS REAPED AS AI MAKES RAPID PROGRESS

Technological advances transform computer industry and daily life

By ZHANG ZHOUXIANG
zhangzhouxiang@chinadaily.com.cn

Just five seconds after Abu was asked to paint a picture of cattle returning to a farm, an image was provided with the reply, "Here it is".

The work of art was truly impressive, as Abu is not a human, but a robot based on artificial intelligence, or AI.

indepth

In addition to painting, the robot can write reports, make video clips, and, at the command of those in its user group, perform all the tasks a human can do on a computer.

Thanks to the development of computer algorithms, the development of AI has accelerated so rapidly in recent years that it has acquired skills previously thought to be the sole preserve of humans.

Zhou Xiao, an assistant professor at Renmin University of China's Gaoling School of Artificial Intelligence, listed some examples of AI that can be used in daily life, including those that compete with humans in playing games such as Go.

See *AI*, page 2

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PAGE TWO

AI: New job opportunities emerge

From page 1

This game, developed by the AI company DeepMind in October 2015, features a search algorithm, deep neural networks and reinforcement learning — the science of decision-making.

AI can also recognize car registration plate numbers to help police hunt suspects. For example, in 2016, AI could correctly recognize 94 percent of car plate numbers, but a police officer was still required to man a computer screen. By 2020, AI could correctly recognize 99 percent of car plate numbers, doing away with the need for a human. Police forces are also benefiting from the use of robotic dogs.

The recently launched AI-related technology ChatGPT (Generative Pretrained Transformer) uses a natural language transformer algorithm to enable it to "understand" human language.

Wang Jianshuo, founder and CEO of Baixing AI, a company building the basic infrastructure for a world in which bots talk with bots, said, "The way in which this algorithm works is comparable to finding a point in a space.

"In human language, one might need thousands of parameters to describe an object. For example, to be defined, an apple needs parameters such as "edible", "fruit", "green" or "red", and to be grown from a tree. It is generally less than 10 centimeters in diameter. The more parameters there are to define, the more accurately AI can find the right point."

Wang cited apples and bananas as two examples. With parameters such "edible", "sweet" and "fruit", neither humans nor AI could distinguish them from each other.

But with the addition of parameters referring to shape, such as "long" or "round", such distinction is achieved. Parameters referring to color, such as "red", "green" or "yellow" enable a more certain judgment to be made.

"That's also how GPT works — most of the time it takes thousands of parameters for AI to define an object like we humans do. We just do not realize that," Wang said.

GPT-3 technology, on which ChatGPT and related technologies are based, features an excellent understanding of human language.

Unlike other forms of AI that can only take commands from certain types of sentences, GPT-3 analyzes a sentence like humans do to obtain its true meaning, which enables it to be commanded like talking to a friend.

However, this also means that AI might be misunderstood if given orders without ample clarity and information.

A reporter twice asked BaixingAI, a domestic app, to draw an image titled "crane". However, the app initially drew a bird flying amid mountains and rivers, before drawing a machine working at a construction site.

In an academic essay on ChatGPT's potential, prospects and limitations, Zhang Junping, a professor of computer technology at Fudan University in Shanghai, stressed that the amount of data the language model uses is of key importance to AI such as GPT.

"ChatGPT generates responses that match the user's intent with multiple variations. It captures previous conversational context to answer certain hypothetical questions, greatly enhancing the user experience in conversational interaction mode," Zhang wrote in the essay.

Swift progress

AI has revolutionized not only the computer industry but also daily life. With the technology making major progress in the games industry over the past five years, people can now play games such as chess or Go with smart forms of AI as opponents to sharpen their own skills.

With image-recognition AI becoming more advanced, it is now easy to use it to unlock a door or make a payment. GPT is also developing rapidly, with the result that the way in which people interact with computers might change.

Chen Jing, a researcher at the Fengyun Institute of Science, Technology and Strategy in Beijing, said the progress made by GPT, and the emergence of GPT4, have fundamentally changed the way in which humans interact with computers.

Computers typically receive instructions from humans mainly through a keyboard or mouse, with the user clicking on an icon, or typing in a command. However, with speech recognition and facial recognition AI technologies becoming more mature in the 2010s, computers can now receive new forms of input, such as sound, Chen said.

GPT4 technology, announced by the research company OpenAI on March 15, takes this process a step further. With its ability to recognize images more accurately and reliably, this technology understands humans more efficiently.

Chen said the technology could enable humans to command machines through gestures. For example, there are already smart appliances on the market that can be given oral instructions. In the future, humans will be able to convey such instructions simply by waving their arms, with this action being caught on camera. Such technology currently exists but is not yet fully developed.

"Imagine leaving home for the office. You have to turn off the lights and lock the door," Chen said. "With GPT-4, all you need do is wave goodbye to the camera at your gate, and AI will understand you, turn off all unnecessary appliances, close the door, and lock it.

"When you come home, just smile at the camera, and it will 'wake up' everything. This is not only because AI recognizes your face based on technology that became fully developed around 2020, but also because it can understand your gestures based on GPT-4."

Wang said one of the biggest changes AI could bring to humans is the way in which we live.

"There used to be a saying that AI could only do repetitive work, such as copying and pasting, but as it has advanced, such a saying is fast becoming outdated. Today, AI is creative, as shown in the images it draws, and it also saves time and energy for we humans and helps us be more creative."

Occupational link

Not everybody is delighted with the advances made by AI, and such unhappiness appears to be linked to a person's occupation.

Xi Li, a 41-year-old painter, who uses a pseudonym, said: "The images drawn by AI are soulless. This technology can help humans, but never replace human hands.

"We don't call the work produced by AI a drawing — AI is only collecting material online and sticking it together."

A science fiction writer, who requested anonymity, said AI can never write as well as professional writers. "There is no yardstick to measure how good an essay is, but those written by AI just do not ring true," he said.

Qu Xiaobo, a professor at the Institute of Population and Labor Economics and deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Human Resource Center, said some people are worried about losing their jobs to AI.

"This is understandable. Even we professors worry about being replaced by AI professors," he said.

Qu remains positive about employment prospects in the age of AI. "While diminishing jobs, AI also creates new ones," he said.

"Its general effect on the market will depend on how many jobs disappear and the number of new ones that emerge. Apparently, AI will increase Total Factor Productivity, or TFP, in society, which means it will theoretically create more jobs than it replaces."

A search for "AI" on several domestic job websites locates new positions involving AI such as "consultant," "engineer" and "tutor". In Beijing, these jobs cover numerous pages, with the salaries offered ranging from 15,000 to 30,000 yuan ($2,182 to $4,365). The average monthly salary for such jobs last year was about 15,000 yuan.

Qu said these newly emerging jobs mainly involve dealing with AI, or what he terms "jobs for human-AI interactions".

Wang said the rapid development of AI will create new jobs, adding that with every major technological advance, new employment opportunities emerge.

"With the invention of automobiles, we got drivers, with the invention of airplanes, we got pilots. Living standards in general have been rising with such progress, as productivity has increased. The faster AI progresses, the easier life will become," Wang said.

However, keeping hold of a job remains a challenge for many who lack the skills needed for a new occupation.

Qu said there is a "structural mismatch" in the jobs market, adding that this is not unique to AI, but has been observed throughout human history, as technology makes continual progress. The difficulties graduates currently face in finding jobs are part of such a "structural mismatch, Qu added.

To solve this problem, individuals need to keep learning new things to acquire experience and skills. Qu also stressed the role played by the State in providing employees with better training to enable them to constantly update their skills to meet changes in the employment market.

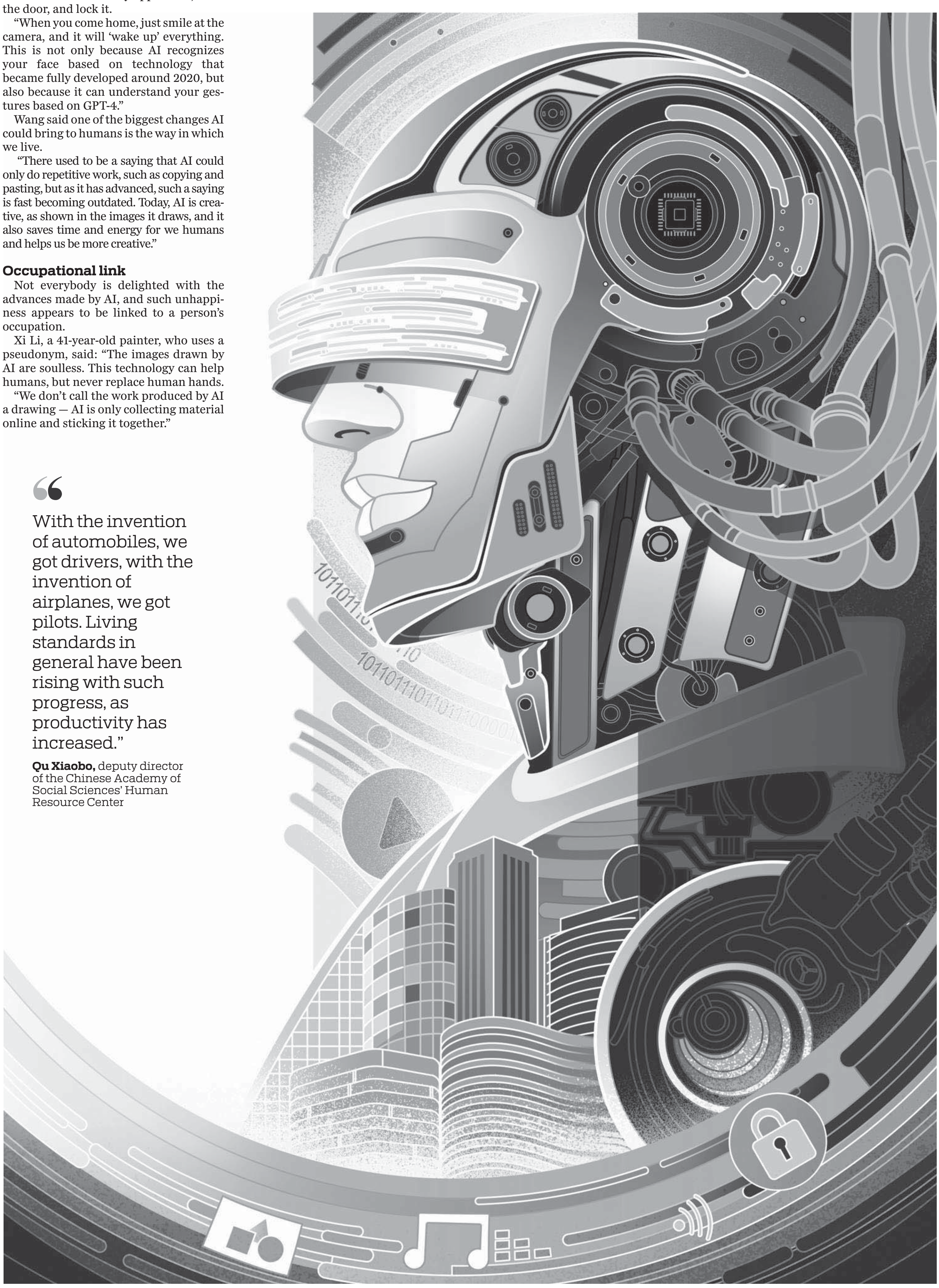
Zhang, from Fudan University, said AI is still far from being sufficiently developed to replace humans.

Addressing the future of AI, all the interviewees in this article see hope.

Zhou said GPT-4 has not performed well in all tests, but it has revolutionized the AI industry by enabling it to understand the human tongue.

"In essence, AI has been invented by humans to assist them," Zhou added.

Yang Xiaoheng contributed to this story.



"With the invention of automobiles, we got drivers, with the invention of airplanes, we got pilots. Living standards in general have been rising with such progress, as productivity has increased."

Qu Xiaobo, deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Human Resource Center

SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Heat wave to grip most parts of nation this week

By LI HONGYANG
lihongyang@chinadaily.com.cn

Most regions of China are forecast to experience their first heat wave of the year this week, with maximum temperatures soaring to 37 C in some areas, the China Meteorological Administration said on Monday.

An El Nino system is building along the equator in the eastern Pacific Ocean, which could send global average temperatures soaring to a record high this year or in 2024, the CMA said.

Several regions, including Beijing and Tianjin municipalities, Hebei and Henan provinces and the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, are expected to see temperatures rising above 35 C on Tuesday and Wednesday. Northern parts of Shandong province are forecast to experience temperatures around 37 C, according to weather forecasters.

Large parts of the country have seen a rapid increase in their maximum temperatures, with Jinan in Shandong province and Xingtai in Hebei province hitting 37 C and Beijing hitting 35 C on Monday.

The Shandong provincial meteorological service issued a yellow alert for high temperatures, the lowest in the three-tier warning system, at 6 am on Monday. In the cities of Jinan, Dongying and Zibo, temperatures are expected to touch 37 C on Tuesday, the meteorological service said.

In a news release on May 3, the World Meteorological Organization had said the likelihood of an El Nino occurring in the second half of the year is increasing, and the event would fuel high temperatures globally.

El Nino is a naturally occurring climate phenomenon that starts with unusually warm surface water in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, which then changes weather worldwide. It occurs on average every two to seven years, and one episode typically lasts nine to 12 months, the WMO said.

Zhou Bing, chief expert at the National Climate Center, said: "The appearance of an El Nino will inevitably cause abnormal weather and climate events in regions, or globally. ... The last super El Nino occurred from autumn 2014 to spring 2016, during which temperatures were the warmest since 1850."

A strong El Nino may increase precipitation in the Yangtze River Basin, which in turn will increase the chances of a warm winter, Zhou added.

Various analyses suggest that 2023 or 2024 will very likely set a record for the warmest year globally, the National Climate Center said.

Surface water in the eastern Pacific is rapidly warming up, and a persistent warm water situation can lead to longer periods of abnormal climate, it said. Some countries around the tropical Pacific, including those in North America, East Asia and South Asia, will be the first to be affected by an El Nino, it added.

A giant panda lies on a block of ice at Chimelong Safari Park in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Sunday.
CHEN JIMIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Infringement: Draft rules to help set boundaries on AI use

From page 1

"Moreover, if a singer successfully registers a trademark through his or her unique or recognizable voice, the AI-generated songs may even be considered as trademark infringement," Zhao added.

Both lawyers pointed out that music videos featuring AI-generated voices may also have infringed on the names, portraits and voice rights of those singers.

Citing the Chinese Civil Code, Liu said the protection of voices is the same as that for protection of portraits, meaning no individual or organization can debase or falsify voices of others by means of information technology.

"Voice is a personal right, and unique or recognizable tones even have business value, as Sun's voice does," he said. "So the use of her voice without her permission could be an infringement."

The experts added that using celebrities' names and imitating their voices through AI could also create unfair competition, because the act could mislead audiences and confuse the public.

As ChatGPT, an AI chatbot developed by Open-AI, takes the technology world by storm, AI-related products and services have rapidly grown. While they have improved the efficiency of people's lives and work, they have also created new problems.

In April, the Cyberspace Administration of China, the country's top internet regulator, started soliciting public opinions on a draft measure addressing emerging AI services, which aims to regulate the application of the new technology and promote its healthy development.

Zhao said he regards the draft as a quick response to the new industry by rule of law and lauded it for setting boundaries.

"For example, it states that AI-generated service providers should guarantee data they use for training must not infringe upon others' intellectual property and other legitimate rights, and the generated content should be annotated," he said.

The 21-article draft clarified that the country supports innovation, promotion, use and international cooperation on AI, but underscored that actions will be taken if AI-generated products, including texts, images, voices and videos, are found to have infringed on people's images, reputations, privacy or business secrets.

The administration stopped accepting solicitations on Wednesday.

So far, the singers involved in the AI-generated songs have not responded to the use of their voices, but a few musicians have shown their interest in the technology.

Canadian singer Grimes openly welcomes people using AI to imitate her voice for creative purposes, saying creators are free to use her voice without penalty and she will split royalties derived from any successful recordings with them, according to a report by Shine, a digital media product run by Shanghai Daily.

The report also mentioned Zhao Hong, a Chinese rapper nicknamed Xiao Lao Hu, or "little tiger", who has 486,000 followers on Sina Weibo, China's Twitter-like platform. Zhao said he is interested in learning how to work with AI, adding that it will be difficult to create content in the future without using it.

Guided tour

A guide dressed in *hanfu*, or traditional Han attire, shows students around Xiangyang Museum in Xiangyang, Hubei province, on Sunday. The event marked International Museum Day, which falls on Thursday. YANG DONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Experts: Swap Connect to attract more inflows

Launch of new trading program provides secure channel for international investors

By OSWALD CHAN in Hong Kong
oswald@chinadailyhk.com

The long-awaited Swap Connect program, which is poised to attract more overseas capital inflows into the world's second-largest bond market, commenced trading on Monday.

Northbound trading of Swap Connect provides a secure channel for international investors to trade interest rate swap products on the mainland via a connection between institutions in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the mainland.

The program aims to facilitate global investors' management of interest rate risks arising from their allocation to mainland bonds, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority said in a statement.

Financial institutions such as HSBC, Bank of China (Hong Kong), the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, China CITIC Bank and Deutsche Bank executed the first batches of trade for overseas and Hong Kong institutional investors on the first trading day.

Guotai Junan International said that its subsidiary Guotai Junan Securities Hong Kong completed the first group of five swap transactions totaling 100 million yuan ($14.37 million).

At the online launch ceremony, People's Bank of China Vice-Governor Pan Gongsheng, said the rollout of the program marked an important step in China's financial opening-up and reflected the firm determination of the central government to support the long-term prosperity, stability and development of the HKSAR.

Wang Linggui, deputy director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, said the central government supports Hong Kong, and the mainland is continuously improving the level of financial cooperation in order to "attract more international capital to the nation, share the country's development dividends, and enhance Hong Kong's competitive advantages."

Under Swap Connect, the China Foreign Exchange Trade System and overseas electronic trading platforms recognized by the PBOC will jointly provide trading services for Hong Kong and international investors. OTC Clear, the subsidiary of Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing, and Shanghai Clearing House will provide central clearing services for Hong Kong, international and mainland investors.

Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu said at the launch ceremony that Swap Connect will have a "synergistic effect" with Bond Connect. Initiated in 2017, Bond Connect allows global investors to trade onshore bonds in the mainland bond market through the trading and settlement platforms of Hong Kong.

"The new measures will provide international investors with richer investment and risk management tools, and strengthen Hong Kong's position as the world's largest offshore renminbi business center and international risk management center," Lee said.

Eddie Yue Wai-man, chief executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, said at the launch that Swap Connect is another milestone in financial cooperation between Hong Kong and the mainland.

"It will create favorable conditions for global investors to increase their participation in the onshore bond market, and carries special significance for enhancing the recognition of and confidence in RMB (renminbi) bonds in the international market," Wai-man said. Swap Connect will also provide new opportunities for Hong Kong's financial institutions and strengthen the city's role as a global risk-management center and offshore renminbi hub, he added.

The HKMA said it will closely monitor the implementation of Swap Connect trading together with relevant Hong Kong and mainland regulators, and enhance operational arrangements in accordance with market developments and investors' needs.

HKEX Chief Executive Officer Nicolas Aguzin said that existing financial market connection programs and Swap Connect will facilitate mainland and international investors making diversified investments in different asset classes. This will also help the internationalization process of the renminbi, as the currency is used for bidding, trading and settlement, Aguzin said.

Fan Mingxi, head of China Global Markets at Switzerland-based investment bank UBS, said: "The implementation of Swap Connect will stimulate greater enthusiasm to participate in the world's second-largest bond market. The Chinese mainland's derivatives market has great potential for development."

Swap Connect's clearing link is a highly novel arrangement that has not been used between two derivatives clearinghouses before, said Terry Yang, a partner at global law firm Clifford Chance Hong Kong, adding that both parties will need to study the differences of the two distinct legal systems.

Science: Tech breakthroughs are 'driven by intl cooperation'

From page 1

"The Institute of Physics is one of the best research agencies in this field, especially in topological and superconductor physics," Felser said. Successful collaboration is based on sustained academic excellence and trust, and the friendship built through long-term cooperation can "make science more fun and efficient", she added.

China is now "one of the global front-runners in quantum materials", thanks to its wealth of quality mathematical and physics professionals doing innovative research, Felser said.

A popular application for quantum materials is quantum computing, a rapidly emerging technology that harnesses the laws of quantum mechanics to solve complex calculations that are impossible for even the most powerful classical supercomputers to solve, she said.

According to the scientist, one of the biggest challenges of quantum computers is decoherence — external disturbances that interfere with the delicate quantum states of qubits, leading to the creation and accumulation of errors.

A qubit is the basic unit of information in quantum computers for storage and calculation, similar to the ones and zeros used in standard computers.

To create and manipulate qubits, many types of quantum computers require extreme conditions, such as strong magnetic fields, superconducting materials or extremely low temperatures. These factors have severely limited the practicality and scalability of these machines.

Fortunately, these conditions can be realized at some scientific facilities, such as the Synergetic Extreme Condition User Facility in Huairou, Beijing. "If we want to make a stable quantum computer, we need to make stable qubits and, therefore, we need new materials for the job," Felser said.

However, she added that making suitable quantum materials for stable quantum computers may take decades because they require breakthroughs in basic sciences and production methods.

On a closer time scale, advanced quantum materials can be used in everyday life, such as catalysts to convert carbon dioxide into valuable chemical products, new batteries to store energy, and devices to convert heat into electricity, she said. "We may see prototypes of these technologies in the near future."

New quantum materials may improve the efficiency of waste-to-energy power plants, thus reducing carbon emissions and energy losses, Felser said, adding that this technology could help China achieve its goals of reaching peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and becoming carbon neutral before 2060.

"Technological breakthroughs are driven by international cooperation," she said, emphasizing that academic dialogue and exchanges, especially among young scientists and students, are essential means of cooperation that can facilitate the flow of ideas, which can lead to new collaborative projects and innovations.

Meanwhile, empowering female scientists by giving them more career opportunities and financial and social support would facilitate more contributions to basic sciences and technological discoveries, Felser said.

"Many bright female scientists have to choose between family and career, which can be tough. But there are ways to overcome it," she said. "We, as a society, should tap into the potential of 50 percent of our workforce and let brilliant minds shine."

G7 urged to safeguard economic security

By ZHOU JIN
zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn

China called on the Group of Seven on Monday to urge Washington to correct its aggressive adjustment of monetary policies and avoid shifting domestic risks to the whole world, in order to safeguard economic security.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin made the remarks after reports said the upcoming G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan, was expected to issue an economic security statement emphasizing joint efforts to counter "economic coercion" and reduce dependence on China in key areas like semiconductors.

Meanwhile, there were some voices of concern raised over the potential dire consequences if the United States were to fail to resolve its debt ceiling stalemate, which could tip its economy into recession, as well as worries that the G7 nations can little afford further risks to their fragile economies.

World Bank President David Malpass told Reuters the risk of a US default added to problems already facing the global economy, which was entering a prolonged period of slow growth.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman told a regular news briefing that "if the G7 countries were actually concerned about economic security, they should urge the US not to seek a solution to its debt default problem by constantly raising the debt limit".

Wang added that "if they really were concerned about economic security, they should take prompt action to identify the perpetrators of the Nord Stream pipeline explosions and hold them accountable to safeguard the security of key transnational infrastructure".

The US should also be urged to stop bullying other countries under the pretext of national security, coercing its allies to form exclusive cliques and disrupting global industrial and supply chains, Wang said.

He called on G7 members to urge the US to stop dividing the world into two markets and systems, which is the primary threat to the world economy at the moment.

The US has been pushing countries to economically decouple from China, imposing a technology blockade on China and wantonly oppressing Chinese enterprises, Wang said.

Such moves have nothing to do with fair competition, but have seriously violated the principles of market economy and the rules of the World Trade Organization, he said. "We urge the US, Japan and other members of the club of rich countries to refrain from advancing the interest of their small clique at the expense of the rest of the international community."

China hopes they will think of tangible ways to contribute to world peace, stability and development, he said, calling on Japan to not become an accomplice of economic coercion while holding the rotating presidency of the G7.

CHINA

Skilled work for disabled on increase

Rise in such jobs over manual labor tied to internet and livestreaming

By **CHENG SI** in Beijing
and **SHI RUIPENG** in Nanning

China continues to promote the employment of people with disabilities to achieve the national goal of common prosperity.

As of the end of last year, 9.05 million registered people with disabilities had found jobs, and between 2017 to 2021, more disabled people have found jobs in skill- and knowledge-based positions, rather than labor-intensive ones, according to a report released on Monday by the Social Sciences Academic Press, which focuses on the disabled cause.

It said that the disabled population stands at 85 million, accounting for roughly 6 percent of the national population, and thus their employment — the major source of income — matters to the goal of creating common prosperity.

Allowing for their large population, the disabled still face problems landing jobs due to weaker education and skills, job discrimination and the lack of accessible working environments.

To better their employment, governments, social organizations and companies have channeled efforts and resources in the past few decades toward helping to reduce job discrimination against the disabled by improving public awareness and legislation, and introducing more support policies.

For example, a law to protect the disabled introduced in December 1990, was amended in 2008 and 2015 to stress the right to work. From the early 1990s, central departments started to explore new mechanisms for employing a certain proportion of disabled people, which was later clearly defined in a State-level regulation in 2007 that requires the disabled to make up no less than 1.5 percent of a company's employees.

Local authorities and social organizations have found new solutions to help more disabled people land jobs by taking advantage of the digital economy and flexible employment.

Nanning, capital of the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, set up an assisted subsidized employment institution with financial support from AAC Technologies in February last year. About 68 people with mental or physical disabilities have been employed so far to do manual work such as assembling electronic components, or to do needlework for leather products.

Cai Xiaofeng, 33, who suffers from polio, said that she had borne the pressure of raising three children while jobless because of her disability, but her situation has improved since she started working at the institute last year.

"It takes about 10 minutes to reach work on my electric scooter. I earn about 3,000 yuan ($430) per month and work from 9 am to 5 pm, and my workload isn't heavy. I am now also able to take care of my family," she said.

Nanning also set up an entrepreneurship center for livestreaming last year with support from local companies, which has so far trained 100 disabled people, helped two become livestreaming anchors and another eight find jobs in the livestreaming sector.

9.05 million
registered people with disabilities had found jobs as of the end of last year.

Li Xia, an official from the Jiangxi Disabled Persons' Federation, told a news conference in Beijing on Monday that although the province has a weaker manufacturing base and a shortage of job vacancies, it has promoted the employment of disabled people in recent decades.

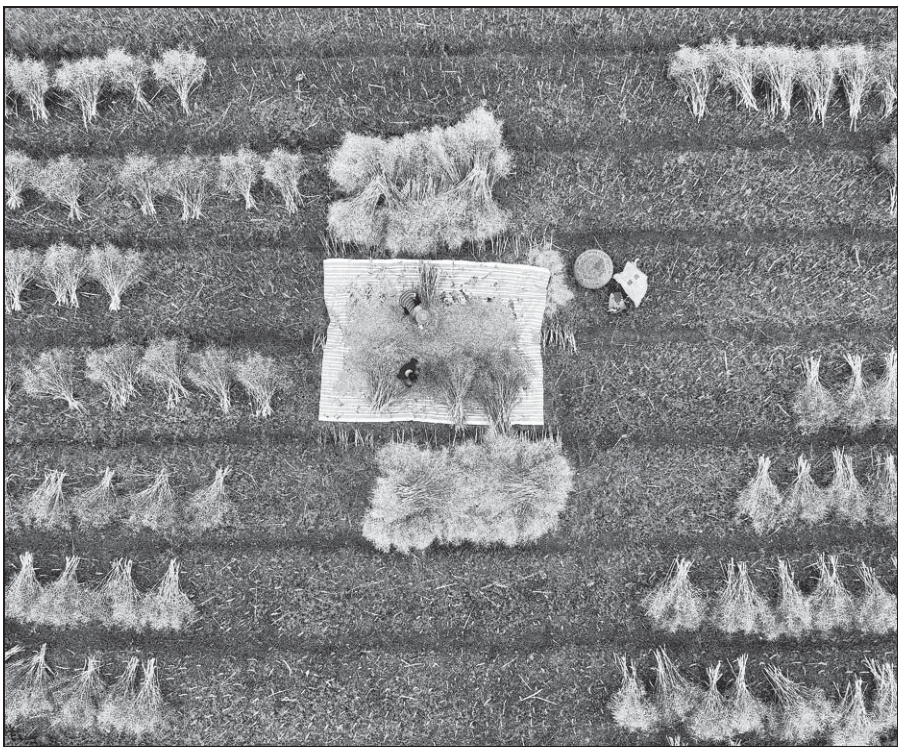
"We have introduced 30 support policies for the employment of disabled people," she said. "About 398,000 registered disabled people of working age — out of 683,000 in the province — had found jobs by last year, as had nearly 98 percent of graduates with disabilities."

Zheng Gongcheng, director of the Institute for Disability Research at Renmin University of China, told the news conference that the disabled cause will become more important to national development in the future as legislation, employment and healthcare for the disabled are improved. He said that the use of the internet will create more opportunities for the disabled.

Contact the writers at chengsi@chinadaily.com.cn

People with disabilities learn pottery skills during a training program for the disabled at a kiln workshop in Ruian, Zhejiang province, on Monday. SUN LIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Harvest time



Villagers separate rapeseed from the pods by beating them in Kuzongqiao town in Hengyang, Hunan province, on Sunday. The rapeseed harvest begins in many parts of Hunan in early summer. Local farmers seize favorable farming conditions to intensify their harvest efforts. CAO ZHENGPING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Zhongguancun Forum even more international than ever

By **DU JUAN**
dujuan@chinadaily.com.cn

The 2023 Zhongguancun Forum is scheduled to be held in Beijing from May 25 to 30, and State leaders, foreign dignitaries, heads of international science and technology organizations, diplomatic envoys and business representatives will be invited to the opening ceremony, a senior official said at a news conference for the forum on Monday.

Under the theme of "Open Cooperation for a Shared Future", this year's forum will include conferences, exhibitions, announcements of research developments, competition in cutting-edge fields and technology trading, with around 150 events in all.

Yu Yingjie, vice-mayor of Beijing, said the forum will focus on cutting-edge fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum science and brain-computer interfaces, exploring trends in technological innovation, showcasing the latest achievements and the discovery of new technologies.

A total of 55 parallel sessions are to be held during the forum, which will focus on artificial intelligence, life science, clean energy and other frontier fields, as well as data management, women's scientific and technological innovation, and digital sports. For the competition in cutting-edge fields, a record 2,500 teams from 30 countries and regions will attend.

Wu Zhaohui, vice-minister of Science and Technology, said the organizer has invited more international technology institutes and global companies to the forum.

Guests will be invited from 80 countries and regions, and 200 foreign government departments, international organizations and institutions will take part. Over a quarter of the speakers are non-Chinese.

"We aim to turn the ZGC Forum into an important international science and technology summit and a platform for new scientific achievements and related policies, to contribute Chinese strength and wisdom to global sciences and technological development," Wu said.

Shanghai busts money laundering by online tipping

By **ZHOU WENTING** in Shanghai
zhouwenting@chinadaily.com.cn

Shanghai police said on Monday that they have cracked the first national case in which suspects laundered money by exploiting the tipping function in livestreaming.

Twenty-one suspects were arrested in the case, which involved nearly 100 million yuan ($14.4 million).

It was uncovered as police in Shanghai's Pudong district were looking into a case of fundraising fraud.

100 million yuan
was involved in the money laundering case.

While police were tracking the whereabouts of the money last June, they found that a colossal amount had been given as tips to an anchor on a livestreaming platform — and each time the suspect tipped the anchor, money was transferred to his personal bank account by the anchor.

Police later determined that between June 2019 and July 2020, the suspects contacted the anchor surnamed Li and proposed committing the offense in order to transfer and conceal criminal proceeds. Li and other team members were given commissions as a reward.

With full knowledge that the money was the proceeds of a fundraising fraud, Li and his colleagues accepted the money during livestreaming, and laundered the tips for the suspects, police said.

Four suspects, including Li, have been arrested by police on suspicion of money laundering, and the other 17 suspects have been subjected to compulsory criminal measures on suspicion of covering up and withholding money obtained through criminal means.

Zhejiang village takes unique path to prosperity

By **MA ZHENHUAN** in Hangzhou
mazhenhuan@chinadaily.com.cn

Huayuan village in Dongyang, Zhejiang province, first turned to mahogany furniture, and then to new materials and biomedicine as part of its rural vitalization efforts.

The entire village of 65,000 people has been lifted out of poverty. Each family now has a modern house, and private cars are common.

Huayuan had an operating income of 65.5 billion yuan ($9.48 billion) from enterprises in the village, with annual per capita income rising to 165,000 yuan last year.

Yet 40 years ago, its population was just 496, per capita income was 87 yuan and only a few families lived in houses with tiled roofs.

"I started to be interested in mahogany furniture when I was 16. I have witnessed the development of the mahogany furniture industry here for the past two decades," said Lei Qinglian, who now owns four big booths at the mahogany furniture production center. "Huayuan village has a mahogany furniture production center with a complete industrial chain and the characteristics of an industrial cluster."

The mahogany furniture production base in Huayuan village in Dongyang, Zhejiang province. WANG JIANGHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

In the early 1980s, Shao Qinxiang, chairman of the Huayuan Group, which manages the furniture production center in Dongyang, said that Huayuan should change its path to development and instead try to create prosperity and strengthen the village through the introduction of industry.

In 2005, the local government began to offer services to help create platforms for companies to gather resources to develop a mahogany furniture industry.

In 2009, the Huayuan Group began to create a market platform for the industry, which integrated raw materials, production, furniture design, logistics, sales, cultural festivals and other services.

Huayuan's success lies in making the best use of the market, said Hou Yunchun, former deputy director of the Development Research Center of the State Council.

As of the end of last year, the village was home to 2,950 private businesses, including 1,871 engaged in the mahogany industry.

"Huayuan has grasped the development opportunities presented by each period, and taken action. It can be regarded as the model of working with the times," said Shen Chi, former deputy director of the NDRC's China Center for Urban Development.

Multiple industrial projects have been introduced to the village, injecting fresh momentum into the local economy and helping it take on a new look.

To achieve stable development, the Huayuan Group pays close attention to emerging sectors like biomedicine, new energy, new materials and new building materials, as well as to services related to culture, tourism, education and medicine.

"Huayuan's experience not only proves that it is possible to turn a poor village into a rich one, it also creates a development path for rural vitalization that uses industry as its premise and simultaneously focuses on infrastructure and public services," said Yun Wenju, director of the Engineering Technology Innovation Center at the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Since Zhejiang province was designated a demonstration zone for achieving common prosperity two years ago, communities across the province have adopted measures in pursuit of special industries, with the aim of narrowing the rural-urban gap.

Chongqing police uncover car insurance scams that used staged accidents

By **TAN YINGZI** in Chongqing
tanyingzi@chinadaily.com.cn

Chongqing police recently arrested seven suspects for a series of car insurance scams involving staged incidents.

Police found that the group, based at a car repair shop, had faked 93 traffic accidents and received 680,000 yuan ($97,800) in compensation between March 2018 and January 2023.

The case is still under investigation, according to police.

Last April, officers from the Chongqing Nan'an district public security sub-bureau received a report from the Chongqing Insurance Industry Association saying that the number of accidents reported by many individuals was significantly higher than average, and the frequency of vehicle replacement was also obviously abnormal, so the association suspected fraud.

After analysis of the activities of the claimants, their vehicles and claims records, Nan'an police arrested a gang headed by a man named Xiang in March.

Xiang confessed that at his auto repair shop, some clients did not want to pay for expensive repairs and others hoped to defraud their insurance companies, so the employees worked with them to stage accidents, driving their clients' and their own cars in search of opportunities to create collisions.

Sometimes, the suspects would also involve innocent people and add to authenticity by engineering three-vehicle accidents, which threatened lives and property, the police said.

After a collision, the repair shop would contact a loss assessment company to determine the loss, and then share the insurance money with the company.

Police have warned insurance companies to strengthen risk prevention and control, and establish information-sharing channels with public security organs, so that the police can uncover evidence quickly and crack down on insurance fraud.

Car owners should also increase their awareness of insurance fraud and avoid incurring prosecution out of greed for minor profit.

From 2019 to 2021, courts across the country concluded more than 300 cases of motor insurance fraud, 43 of which were heard by Beijing courts, Beijing Changping District People's Court said.

It suggested the creation of a national network for motor vehicle insurance and that public security organs, traffic control departments, insurance regulators and insurance industry associations improve communication and coordinate law enforcement to combat illegal activities.

CHINA

Nimble fingers

Overseas students studying at Shandong Vocational College of Science and Technology learn traditional Chinese crocheting in Weifang, Shandong province, on Sunday. The students learned how to crochet as national vocational education week kicked off in the city. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Ministry on alert for flood season

Survey combs reservoirs, sluices, dikes nationwide to identify risks in facilities

By HOU LIQIANG
houliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

China has identified risks in its water resources management facilities as it prepares to cope with flooding in some major river basins this year, according to the Ministry of Water Resources.

In a national survey of flood and drought risks, the ministry combed 97,000 reservoirs, 78,000 flood control sluices, 315,000 kilometers of dikes and 98 flood detention areas.

Aside from learning about the general condition of these facilities, a series of risks have been identified, said Zheng Shichen, an official with the ministry's Dam Safety Management Center.

Some reservoirs, for example, have seen flood control capabilities damaged due to previous deluges that overloaded their intended limits, he said. A number of earth and stone dams with cracks were found to be leaking.

"Some reservoir dams have inadequate safety monitoring and management facilities," Zheng said.

He said the ministry will use both engineering and other methods to eliminate safety hazards in 9,385 small reservoirs.

While measures will be taken to reinforce some facilities, others will be emptied if the risks can't be resolved before flood season, he said.

This year, the ministry plans to strengthen 3,500 small-sized reservoirs found to have problems. A total of 3 billion yuan ($431 million) from the central government has been transferred to local governments for reinforcement work on 1,890 facilities.

China's flood season began on March 24, eight days earlier than usual. So far, the flood control situation this year has been tougher than in previous years, said Shang Quanmin, an official with the ministry's department of flood and drought control.

"Torrential rains in some regions in the southern part of the country swelled water levels in 50 rivers in Jiangxi, Hunan, Fujian, Zhejiang and Guangdong provinces and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region above their danger marks, 40 percent higher than the average for the same period over the past 10 years," he said.

Forecasts show that the country will experience more frequent regional and periodic drought and flooding this year, with an increase in extreme weather events.

In the majority of regions, flood season had already begun by May. Heavier than usual rainfall is expected to fall in the basins of the Haihe, Pearl, Songhua and Liaohe rivers, as well as the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, resulting in more severe flooding than normal.

The ministry has organized flood-control drills in some river basins.

Liu Weiping, vice-minister of water resources, attended the drill for the Songhua River on Wednesday.

It involved the testing of flood forecasting, the flood control operation of key reservoirs, flood detention areas, and other command procedures for emergency river basin responses, the ministry said in a news release on Friday.

Water diversion plays key role in development

By HOU LIQIANG
houliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

China's mega water diversion project, which channels water from the Yangtze River Basin to the drought-prone north, has diverted over 62 billion cubic meters of water, according to the China South-to-North Water Diversion Corporation.

The South-to-North Water Diversion Project has benefited more than 150 million people, the corporation said in a media release on Sunday, and now supplies 75 percent of the water used in Beijing, and 99 percent of the water used in Tianjin.

The project follows three routes: eastern, middle and western. The middle route, which starts at the Danjiangkou Reservoir in Hubei province and runs across Henan and Hebei provinces before reaching Beijing and Tianjin, started operation on Dec 12, 2014.

The eastern route transfers water from Jiangsu province to areas including Tianjin and Shandong province. Its first phase, which serves Jiangsu and Shandong provinces, went into operation in November 2013.

The western route is still in the planning stage.

The corporation stressed the role of the project in supporting economic development and promoting environmental improvement.

Since the middle and eastern routes were commissioned, they have helped support GDP growth of almost 10 trillion yuan ($1.4 trillion), it said. The project's enhancement of water capacity has enabled many areas along its routes to develop new towns and industrial parks.

A pumping station on the eastern route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project in Sihong, Jiangsu province on Friday. FANG DONGXU / FOR CHINA DAILY

For example, local authorities in Zhengzhou, capital of Henan, were able to persuade digital products manufacturer Foxconn to build a plant in the city in 2010, as a result of the promised sufficiency of water supplied by the middle route.

The release stated that to date, the middle route has supplied over 100 million cubic meters of water for domestic and industrial use in the Xiong'an New Area.

In total, the project has added almost 10 billion cubic meters to water bodies in North China, helping reverse the decline in groundwater levels, which started in the 1970s.

Baiyangdian Lake, the largest wetland ecosystem in northern China, dried up for five straight years between 1984 and 1989. Thanks to supplementary water provided by the middle route since 2018, however, the lake has expanded from 171 square kilometers to 275 sq km.

"The wetland that is regarded as the 'pearl of North China' has gradually resumed its former vitality," the release stated.

Hong Kong resident given life sentence for espionage

By YANG ZEKUN
yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

Hong Kong resident John Leung Shing-wan was sentenced to life imprisonment and had his political rights stripped for life for espionage, according to a statement issued by the Suzhou Intermediate People's Court in Jiangsu province on Monday.

The court rendered its verdict on Monday. It also confiscated personal property worth 500,000 yuan ($71,800).

Born in May 1945, Leung holds permanent residency in the Hong Kong Special Administration Region and also possesses a United States passport, the court said.

According to provisions of the Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure Law, Suzhou's national security bureau detained him on April 15, 2021, on suspicion of spying.

No further details of the case were released.

Given the grave state of the current struggle against espionage, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, adopted a revision to the Counter-Espionage Law, which was first released in 2014, to safeguard national security in April.

According to the NPC Standing Committee's Legislative Affairs Commission, traditional and nontraditional security threats are intertwined, and intelligence activities are more complicated. Espionage now extends to more extensive fields, more diverse targets and uses more covert methods, requiring the amendment of the Counter-Espionage Law to meet current needs.

The revised law will come into effect on July 1, and will provide a strong legal guarantee in the battle against infiltration, subversion and the theft of secrets.

First domestic mRNA COVID vaccine delivered

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
zhangyu1@chinadaily.com.cn

An elderly man in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, received a booster shot of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine on Saturday. It was the first dose of the domestically developed COVID-19 vaccine based on messenger RNA technology to be delivered, according to its maker, CSPC Pharmaceutical Group.

Developed independently by the drugmaker in Shijiazhuang, the vaccine will be available across the country.

It has been given a priority recommendation as a booster shot for adults in the latest national plan for COVID-19 vaccinations, issued in April by the State Council's joint COVID-19 prevention and control mechanism.

"The mRNA vaccine can produce strong humoral immunity, cellular immunity and long-term immune memory, providing longer sustainable protection for those vaccinated," said Yang Hanyu, vice-chairman of the group, who is in charge of the company's research and development work on vaccines.

He added that the mRNA vaccine displays significant advantages in preventing severe illness and death caused by COVID-19.

It covers the core mutations of the Omicron variant and can protect against Omicron strains. In clinical trials, the booster dose proved effective at neutralizing Omicron subvariants BA.5, BF.7, BQ.1.1, XBB.1.5 and CH.1.1, according to the group.

In addition, researchers are able to quickly modify mRNA vaccines to target new strains.

"The production of mRNA vaccines does not require adjuvants, virus preparation or recombinant protein preparation, and can be done quickly as long as the virus' genetic sequence is known," Yang said.

According to the group, the vaccine was approved for emergency use by the National Medical Products Administration in March, and was granted clinical trial approval in April 2022.

The key raw materials and auxiliary materials used in the production of the mRNA vaccine are all produced by the company.

"The group is developing new generations of mRNA vaccines in order to counter mutated virus strains, and actively promote the development of other products based on mRNA technology," Yang said, adding that "mRNA technology has broad prospects, and great application in vaccine research and development."

Submersible engineer gets national award

By ZHANG ZHIHAO
zhangzhihao@chinadaily.com.cn

"I am homesick, basking in the bright moonlight, as two ships sail for the Mariana Trench. Innovating and exploring, we strive together, to roam the hadal trench 10,000 meters down."

This poem was written by Yang Shenshen, one of the chief engineers behind China's most advanced deep-sea manned submersible *Fendouzhe*, or *Striver*, during its sea trials in November 2020.

Born in August 1981, Yang has been involved in building all three of the country's record-setting manned submersibles, namely *Jiaolong*, *Shenhai Yongshi* and *Fendouzhe*. He was recently awarded the National May 1 Labor Medal, the top honor awarded to the most outstanding workers.

On Nov 10, 2020, *Fendouzhe* set a national record by diving to a depth of 10,909 meters in Challenger Deep, an 11,000-meter chasm located at the bottom of the Mariana Trench in the western Pacific Ocean.

President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the team after they successfully completed sea trials for *Fendouzhe*.

Xi said *Fendouzhe*'s success demonstrated that China is capable of conducting scientific exploration and research in the deepest parts of the ocean, and is a reflection of the country's prowess in cutting-edge maritime technology.

He called for scientists and engineers working on deep-sea equipment to continue to contribute to China's rise as a strong maritime nation, as well as to humanity's understanding of the oceans.

Yang Shenshen

Yang was one of the commanders overseeing the trials. "The success was the result of a fighting spirit and of perseverance in overcoming difficulties," he said. "We are very proud to be at the global forefront in terms of manned submersible technology capable of diving to the 10,000-meter mark," he said.

The spirit of innovation and exploration helped propel Yang from an assistant engineer to one of China's leading mechatronics experts on manned submersibles in less than two decades.

He joined the *Jiaolong* research team in 2005. Growing up inland, Yang said he felt nervous when he first saw the ocean, and also about making it his career, but he did not let this faze him. Over the years, Yang and his team overcame many technical challenges, ranging from deep-sea lithium batteries to propulsion technology. Their efforts enabled China to master most of the core technologies used in its manned deep-sea submersibles.

Now, Yang said the team is aiming to create a new manned submersible using resin glass that will offer a 360-degree field of view under the sea, unlike traditional submersibles that only have a small viewing window.

"The ocean's depths may be limited, but our desire to explore them is limitless," he said.

Wheels Up

People practice on BMX bikes at a newly opened pump track park in Shenyang, Liaoning province, on Sunday. Recognized as the world's largest pump track park by the Guinness World Record upon opening, the park has nine courses and will host a number of competitions for BMX biking, skateboarding and rollerblading. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

CHINA

'Ferrymen of life' ease organ donation process for patients' family members

Professionals help honor the deceased person's wishes and soothe their relatives' pain of loss. **Yang Zekun** reports.

'Are you willing to donate your loved one's organs?"

Wang Chulong, who used to work as a nurse in an intensive care unit, is familiar with life and death. However, after becoming a full-time coordinator for organ donations, he has discovered that this is the most difficult question he can ask. It's also the most difficult one for relatives to answer.

He said he drops whatever he is doing and rushes to the hospital whenever he hears about a potential donor because his job revolves around life and death, and he is often in a race against time.

Voluntary posthumous donation and living donations between relatives are China's only sources of organs for transplantation, and the country has vigorously publicized the related policies. Coordinators are involved in almost every successful donation and the publicity and implementation of the policy. As such, they are often popularly known as "ferrymen of life".

Currently, 29 provincial-level authorities have set up organizations for human organ donations, with more than 2,500 coordinators and over 400 volunteer service teams with a total of 10,000 members.

By the mid of this month, about 6.23 million people had registered with the China Organ Donation Administrative Center to donate posthumously, while about 138,200 organs had been donated since 2010.

However, registration is only an expression of the intention to donate, and the process can only be undertaken after strict medical assessment and with the consent of immediate family members. Therefore, voluntary registration does not necessarily ensure that a donation will take place. As a result, coordinators are sometimes faced with refusals, so they often have to try to persuade family members to honor the dead person's wishes.

Above: Organ donation coordinator Wang Chulong talks with a doctor in the ICU at the China-Japan Friendship Hospital in Beijing on April 25. **Left:** Anesthetists are seen working in an operating room at the hospital on Nov 14, 2021. PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

Early experience

In 2011, Wang, a 35-year-old native of Hebei province, became a nurse and started work in the ICU at the China-Japan Friendship Hospital in Beijing. In 2017, he passed the tests to become an organ donation coordinator and began doing the job in his free time.

He first experienced death in 2011, when he helped treat a 60-something heart attack patient. Efforts to save the man were unsuccessful, and Wang said he lacked the necessary experience that helps seasoned medical professionals become used to the negative feelings that can follow a patient's death.

When the doctor announced the news, the man's family members were heartbroken. Meanwhile, Wang felt numb with a mixture of disappointment, sadness and reluctance to accept the fact.

When his colleagues broke his chain of thought, he realized that he had been helping to arrange clothes for the deceased man to wear.

"I chose to be a coordinator because it linked with my work in the ICU, where I saw so many lives and deaths, which gave me a new perspective on life. Death has never been a taboo subject for me since I took the job," he said.

The process from first contact with a potential donor's family to a successful donation is often a long one.

Days or sometimes months can pass after a severely ill patient is admitted to the ICU to the time they are declared brain-dead. Coordinators have to race against time to ensure that the wishes of potential donors are respected and also help their family members.

Sometimes, although family members know that the chances of survival are slim, they are desperate to try every measure to save the patient.

However, organs have to be used very quickly after death, so coordinators often have to work hard to persuade the family members to agree to a donation within the limited time frame.

Wang said coordinators are sometimes shunned, called names or misunderstood when they approach a potential donor's family members, who often think the patient can still be saved. Some are unhappy at being approached shortly after a loved one's death as they see it as a sort of curse.

When the medical team alerts Wang that a patient may be a potential donor, he ensures that he is fully prepared before he speaks with their immediate family members.

The meeting often starts with a discussion about the patient's condition, followed by details of the organ donation process to show the family how their relative can help others after death.

Wang said the family members may change their minds from time to time, as they usually experience inner struggles.

"Sometimes, they face criticism, such as 'He or she loved you so much in life, how can you leave him/her incomplete in death?' Nine out of 10 refuse for different reasons," he said.

He added that he often spends about a week dealing with his own negative emotions after each donation, and the best thing to do is to get back to work and allow fatigue to help him forget the pain.

Wang registered as a donor after working as a coordinator, and he has told his wife to donate his organs when he dies. "I think it's a continuation of life and the best choice," he said.

Greater respect

After nearly 13 years as a coordinator, Cao Yanfang, from Zhejiang province, feels that her role is not just to persuade family members, but to help people honor the wishes of a relative who has decided to donate.

"I used to think that this work was difficult, but I later discovered that all jobs that involve changing people's minds are hard. Many people find it difficult to change their mind quickly, so I decided to identify and help those who were willing to make donations," she said.

Cao said rejection is a regular part of the coordinator's job. Her experience as an ICU nurse enables her to face life and death bravely, but she still finds that the hardest part of the job is learning how to forge ahead after repeated rejection.

The job also involves dealing with the pain and despair of family members who have lost a loved one, as well as their mental struggle when deciding whether to agree to a donation, she said.

In 2010, her understanding of the coordinator's job was that she had to persuade the families of potential donors to agree after the loved one's death. Therefore, she took great care to obtain all the relevant information about the potential donors and learned how to discuss donation with their family members.

Her first experience was in 2010, when she met the family of a man who had been pronounced brain-dead after a fall.

Cao had to rush to the hospital in Pujiang, Zhejiang province, from Hangzhou, the provincial capital, and during the two-hour drive she mulled over how to raise the topic of organ donation.

The family was in a quiet room at the hospital, so Cao spoke with the patient's wife, telling her that she was a Red Cross volunteer. The woman immediately understood Cao's mission and told her that she and her mother-in-law would not agree to the donation.

"If we donate his corneas, he might not be able to see his way home," she said, leaving Cao at a loss about how to continue the discussion.

Comfort, company

The coordinator's job is more about heart-to-heart communication as they are always dealing with bereaved families. In addition to persuading relatives to agree to the donation and witnessing the removal of the organs, coordinators have to provide comfort and company. Moreover, they often help the family members arrange the funeral.

"There was a time when I began to wonder if I was right for this job. Yet the hope that donation brings to patients over and over again keeps me going and makes me understand the meaning of my work," Cao said.

She also helps train new coordinators, explains their working philosophy and promotes organ donation. She and her colleagues also explore ways to help soothe the pain of loss.

Cao recalled a letter she received from a child. The girl said that initially she felt that her father had abandoned her, her mother and her brother. Later, Red Cross volunteers visited the family and told the girl that her father's donated organs had helped save three people. As a result, she was extremely proud of her father.

"I think another important thing is to let the donor's family truly feel the significance of organ donation, as well as the warmth and respect of society during the donation process," Cao said.

Contact the writer at yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

From left: Wang Chulong displays certificates that show he is a trained coordinator for organ donations. Surgeons transplant a donated organ at the China-Japan Friendship Hospital on Nov 14, 2021. Relatives of organ donors lay flowers at a monument in the Changqing Life Memorial Park in Beijing on March 24.

Greater awareness is needed, expert says

By YANG ZEKUN

China's organ donation network has developed rapidly to form a model fit for the country's needs. However, there is still a severe shortage of organs, which means more people need to understand how such services work, said Hou Fengzhong, director of the China Organ Donation Administrative Center.

In March 2007, the State Council, China's Cabinet, passed the Regulations on Human Organ Transplantation to strengthen supervision of related practices and provide a legal basis for transplants. It also ordered Red Cross societies at all levels to participate in the promotion of organ donation. Hou said the Red Cross's role is the promotion of voluntary, free and dedicated guidance.

China approved voluntary posthumous organ donations in 2010, and stopped using organs from executed prisoners in January 2015. That means voluntary post-death donations and living donations between relatives are the only legal sources. The country currently ranks second in the world for the number of organs donated every year.

In March 2010, pilot programs for posthumous organ donations were launched in 10 provinces, and the center drew on the experiences of organizations overseas to establish the post of coordinator.

"At the time, there was the question of who should first speak to the potential donor's family members to ask if they were willing to donate the organs," Hou said.

In June 2010, about 100 people, mainly medical professionals and Red Cross volunteers, participated in the first training session for donation coordinators.

It covered almost every step of the process, including identifying and assessing potential donors, learning how brain death is determined, the removal of organs, their maintenance and allocation, and the legal, ethical and psychological issues involved. So far, about 3,700 people have received such training, according to the center.

About 6.2 million people have registered with the center as volunteer posthumous donors. However, registration is simply an expression of an individual's intention to donate, and the process can only be undertaken after strict medical assessment and with the consent of immediate family members. Therefore, voluntary registration does not necessarily mean that a donation can be realized, Hou said.

In addition to publicity about donation policies at all levels, the State provides much support.

For example, in 2016, a "green channel" was established by various bodies — including civil aviation, railway and highway authorities — to ensure the timely delivery of donated organs.

Hou said that as more people become aware of changes to organ donation policies, many are concerned about whether they have been donated according to the wishes of the donor's family, and whether they are distributed fairly and used reasonably. Coordinators play an important role in these areas.

Donated organs are allocated through the China Human Organ Allocation and Sharing Computer according to the patient's match type, age, region and illness, and in line with the principles of fairness, justice and openness, the center said.

The center always treats donors with respect, and many cities have allocated special sites for memorial parks to express appreciation, which rarely happens in other countries, Hou said.

He added that although China's organ donation service has developed rapidly, improvements are still needed in some aspects — such as laws and regulations, and personnel training — so more people will understand and recognize the selfless nature of donation.

REPORTER'S LOG

I can discuss the issue, but my heart is still hesitant

Yang Zekun

I first heard about organ donation coordinators when I read a news story in 2020. I was impressed by their courage in doing the job.

I met Wang Chulong in his office, a quiet corner room on the first floor of an inpatient building. It contains just a sofa, a chair, a filing cabinet and a desk with a computer.

As he said, donors' families and the coordinators themselves need such a simple, quiet environment so they can think carefully about the meaning of life. It's somewhere no one can disturb them.

When I asked him if his work as a coordinator had changed his perception of life and death, he simply said that he cherishes his healthy life. I was struck by the calm way the 35-year-old spoke about death, and it made me wonder what he had experienced.

While each successful coordination process means that a family is about to lose a loved one forever, it also means that another life is about to be renewed.

This feeling of joy mixed with sadness makes Wang better appreciate the here and now.

Since that interview, I have been thinking about whether I should donate my organs or those of my relatives. I can talk about donating, but honestly, my heart is still hesitant.

Many people may not have thought about the issue, or have even tried to avoid it because of a belief that it may bring bad luck.

Imagine how hard it must be for a coordinator to confront devastated family members almost every day and ask, "Would you like to donate your relative's organs?"

In China, there is still a huge shortfall in the number of organs needed each year, and awareness of donation is low.

Most of the time, people learn about the service through active coordinators. However, there are only about 2,500 coordinators, which is far from enough. I think it is worth thinking about how to protect and expand this team. After all, in many cases, the difference between death and a new lease on life is simply the absence of a coordinator.

CHINA

Tianjin's sister cities discuss deeper cooperation

By **YANG CHENG** in Tianjin
yangcheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Melbourne, the capital of the Australian state of Victoria, hopes to boost collaboration with its Chinese sister city Tianjin on their shared path toward reaching net zero carbon emissions, a senior Victoria official said at the end of April.

"Ours is the first sister-city relationship between Australia and China. I'm the first person from the government of Victoria to visit China after the three years of COVID-19," Nicholas Reece, deputy lord mayor of Melbourne, told China Daily. "We are very committed to relations, and to more business-to-business and people-to-people ties."

At the top of Reece's agenda is for the two cities to "seek more opportunities and pursue additional focuses", including carbon reduction and advanced smart manufacturing.

"Tianjin and Melbourne, as well as China and Australia, are at the leading edge of the goal to achieve net zero targets. We know that we can't do it on our own, and we need the help from our friends, like Tianjin," he said. "Tianjin has great manufacturing, energy and smart technology capabilities that can help us get to net zero."

Meanwhile, business delegates from another of Tianjin's sister cities — Manchester in the United Kingdom — held online discussions with their counterparts in Tianjin in March in a bid to advance collaboration in the field.

"The two cities have come up with a concrete three-year plan (2023-25) to pursue solid projects," said Luan Jianzhang, director of the Tianjin Foreign Affairs Office.

The efforts are related to China's 2030 peak carbon and 2060 carbon neutrality goals.

A Manchester low carbon high-tech center will be set up in the high-tech zone in Tianjin's Binhai New Area.

"We will explore practical opportunities for cooperation on hydrogen energy, green manufacturing and new energy," said Tom Duke, deputy trade commissioner for China at the Department for International Trade of the British Embassy in China.

Luan also noted that Tianjin initiated a 10-point action plan at the beginning of this year in a bid to accelerate economic growth, to which the partnerships with sister cities will contribute, he said.

Statistics indicate that Tianjin's GDP grew 5.5 percent to 371.5 billion yuan ($53.7 billion) during the first quarter of this year.

From left: A corner of the Xingfuhe community in Jinan, Shandong province. Three residents ride on a motorized tricycle in the community. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Residents flourishing away from floods

Former villagers enjoying life in Jinan

By **SUN SHANGWU** and **ZHAO RUIXUE** in Jinan

With rows of new residential buildings, a cultural square, a shopping complex, an elderly care service center, a kindergarten and clean, tidy roads, the Xingfuhe community in Jinan, Shandong province, is providing former villagers a life that they couldn't have imagined before moving there, according to Liu Guangsheng and his fellow residents.

"Since I moved here three years ago, life has been getting better and better, with new facilities and projects being introduced that are making our lives easier and more convenient," Liu, 48, said.

Before moving to the community, he lived in Qujia village, which is located about 2 kilometers from the Yellow River bank. The village is part of Huanghe town in Jinan's Zhangqiu district.

Huanghe is the Chinese word for the Yellow River, and the town is named for its proximity to the waterway.

For farmers like Liu, the river nourished their farmland, but also brought floods that destroyed their properties. "We had to spend a lot of money to rebuild our houses. What was worse was that as soon as our debts were cleared, the river flooded again, and the roads in our village were muddy," Liu said.

In Shandong, where the Yellow River flows into the sea, more than 600,000 people once lived in the river's flood plain. To help residents escape both the floods and poverty, the province launched a relocation project in 2017.

The project in Zhangqiu was completed in three years, enabling 12,068 farmers from 21 villages in the flood plain to move to the new Xingfuhe community 8 km away. "Our goal is to help the villagers enjoy their new lives downtown," said Liu Wanyin, secretary of the Communist Party of China's working committee in Huanghe.

In Xingfuhe, which means "happy river", a public square provides a place for the residents to gather and participate in recreational activities. The square is themed on the Yellow River, with markings on the ground depicting the former villagers' hometowns and pictures in the corridors telling the river's stories.

> In Xingfuhe, we hope that our happy days will be longer than the Yellow River."
>
> **Liu Wanyin,** secretary of the Communist Party of China's working committee in Huanghe, Jinan, Shandong province

Next to the square, a shopping complex where people can buy their daily needs opened in November, providing jobs for more than 300 residents, according to Liu Wanyin.

"In addition to the well-appointed residential area, we have developed a commercial area and an agricultural area to provide jobs for villagers," he added.

The town's agricultural area sits near a large expanse of wheat fields. Facilities featuring advanced technologies were built in the area by the Lugong Fengnong Agricultural Service to dry and store grains.

The town has signed a contract with the company to manage the farmland using state-of-the-art machinery and crop-growing techniques.

Under the cooperation model, farmers can earn a minimum income of 12,000 yuan ($1,723) per hectare every year. In addition, the town shares 60 percent of the profits earned from their farmland, Liu Wanyin said, adding that some farmers can choose to work for Lugong Fengnong to earn extra money.

Liu Guangsheng manages 20 hectares of farmland for the company, which has provided him with drones that help him better irrigate and fertilize the land, as well as maintain pest control.

"I don't need to carry a sprayer on my back to spray pesticides on the wheat anymore," he said. "Farmwork is much easier and more efficient than before."

His wife runs a barbecue restaurant in their community. The couple have two children. "We cherish our current life. As long as we work hard, we can live well," he said.

About a five-minute drive from Lugong Fengnong is a watermelon growing base.

In a greenhouse, watermelons hang on vines. Three farmers collect the fruit to sell at markets.

"Instead of growing watermelons directly on the ground, this new growing technique can save land and increase yields," said Qian Bin, general manager of the Jinan Xinzheng Ecological Agriculture Cooperative.

Having grown up around the Yellow River, Qian knows the land well.

"The soil here contains a lot of sand, which is suitable for planting selenium-enriched watermelons," he said, adding the cooperative's fruit has earned a reputation at the markets.

"Many farmers have joined our cooperative to grow watermelons."

Liu Wanyin said the town is developing more agricultural projects to boost its collective economy and create a better living environment for villagers. "In Xingfuhe, we hope that our happy days will be longer than the Yellow River," he said.

Contact the writers at zhaoruixue@chinadaily.com.cn

Passengers read while riding rails in train library

CHONGQING — During a recent trip on the No 5609 slow train from downtown Chongqing to Xiushan county, Xing Jie, a 50-year-old construction worker, was able to enjoy reading a collection of poems in the train's newly opened library.

The train, which runs along the Yangtze River at a speed of around 60 kilometers per hour, stops at 17 stations and takes about seven hours to reach its final destination.

Xing takes the train twice a month to commute between downtown Chongqing and the remote Wulong district.

"I prefer slow trains to bullet trains because they're cheaper and still comfortable," he said.

Of late, the regular rider has been amazed to find new bookshelves packed with hundreds of books, and desks and chairs facing the river have replaced the traditional seats in one corner of the train's No 3 carriage.

Passengers and attendants pose in the library carriage of the No 5609 slow train during a journey on April 13. XINHUA

A sign reading "train library" explains the changes. "We revamped our carriage into a learning area at the beginning of the year. In the run-up to the 28th World Book and Copyright Day, which fell on April 23 this year, we invited the Chongqing Library to set up its first train library aboard our train," said Deng Yeqin, head of the No 5609 train crew.

On his way to Wulong, where he and another 1,000 people are engaged in a 15-km high-speed railway construction project, Xing noticed a book written by Lin Huiyin and decided to make it his journey companion.

"I'd heard about Xu Zhimo, the famous poet who fell in love with Lin, so I wanted to know more about her," Xing said, adding that reading while traveling along the Yangtze is worth it just for the picturesque view and comfortable travel experience.

Qin Guangbin, another 50-year-old passenger, was reading documents on his laptop in the learning carriage. A businessman who shuttles between Changshou district and Xiushan, Qin has been taking the slow train for the past five years.

"I've seen great changes to this train over the years, not just the new library. I can tell how hard the crew has worked on improving the travel experience for passengers," Qin said.

As an insider who has witnessed nearly three decades of transport evolution in China, Xing has participated in construction from highways to high-speed railways, which reflects the rapid development of the country.

However, he believes that slow trains remain indispensable to the daily lives of ordinary people, as they serve farmers, students, senior citizens and other groups.

Slow trains have been working on customized services for specific groups of passengers over the years. Some have sacrificed seats to provide space for farmers who travel with livestock for sale, while Deng's train mainly ferries students, who account for the majority of its passengers, especially on the weekends.

"In the future, we will have more books and will try to enrich the travel experience for passengers," Deng added.

XINHUA

Government helps former fishermen land new jobs

GUIYANG — Cui Lanzhi's home is right next to the Wujiang River, and the weather is cool when the breeze blows in. The location makes her family restaurant popular with diners.

"In addition to workers from nearby, many people drive over from the county seat to eat here," the 45-year-old said.

Cui, who comes from a village in Yanhe county, Guizhou province, used to fish along the Wujiang, one of the tributaries along the upper reaches of the Yangtze River.

She and her husband were able to catch plenty of fish, earning 40,000 yuan ($5,818) for about 100 days of work a year.

"Being fishermen is tough. We dined and slept on the boat back then, and sometimes, we fell into the river," she said. Luckily, they were both great swimmers and never encountered any life-threatening situations.

Gradually, the couple found they were catching fewer fish. In 2013, they spent 300,000 yuan to turn their house into a restaurant, but continued to fish, this time for the diners.

To restore biodiversity, China enacted a fishing ban in 332 conservation areas in the Yangtze River basin in January 2020.

This has since been expanded to a 10-year moratorium along the river's main streams and major tributaries, which took effect on Jan 1, 2021.

In response to the ban, Cui officially retired from fishing in 2019. Later that year, she received a 70,000 yuan subsidy from the local government, which she used to expand her business.

Now, the restaurant can seat 200 people at a time and makes daily revenues of around 3,000 yuan.

"As it gets warmer, more people come to eat here," Cui said, adding that the eatery can make as much as 5,000 yuan a day during peak season.

According to the county government, all of its 165 retired fishermen have found employment.

In Xiazhai, a village in Sinan county, Chen Xinjiang also stopped fishing in 2019 and applied for a license to operate a passenger boat. Supported by subsidized loans, he bought a 50-seat vessel, which he put into service last year.

"I rent my boat out to tourist groups in the daytime and offer night tours for individual travelers in the evening. I can make up to 40,000 yuan a month," the 50-year-old said, adding that he also runs a fish restaurant that makes an annual profit of 100,000 yuan.

Sinan paid out 9.4 million yuan to 121 retired fishermen as compensation or in the form of incentives. The county has also helped them start their own businesses and provided employment training and follow-up services to ensure that every former fisherman found employment.

Chen said his wife has just received cabin service training in Zunyi city.

"As the tourism market rebounds, we will be prepared for the upcoming peak season," he said.

XINHUA

Pakistani's Chinese dreams come true

XI'AN — From a Pakistani national who spoke only broken Chinese to a movie actor and entrepreneur, 30-year-old Anees Qadir believes that Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi province, is the place his dreams became a reality.

As a child, Qadir had two dreams: to either become a pilot or an actor. In 2014, following his father's advice, the then-21-year-old enrolled in a course at Northwestern Polytechnical University in Xi'an.

It was there that Qadir developed a deeper knowledge of the history of Sino-Pakistani friendship and China's successful economic development in the past few decades. The Belt and Road Initiative, which was proposed in 2013, only strengthened his determination to stay.

Xi'an impressed him with its ancient history, mouthwatering delicacies and hospitality. He has visited the Terracotta Warriors three times, and his younger brother and sister are also in China. "Now I am familiar with the city and do not need to use navigation apps most of the time," he said with pride.

His acting career also began during his university days, when he used to work as a part-time model.

For Qadir, films are a window into unfamiliar countries and also help build bridges between different cultures.

"Before I came to China, I enjoyed watching Chinese action comedy movies like *Shaolin Soccer* and *Kung Fu Hustle*, and held the misconception that every Chinese knew kung fu," he said, smiling.

"After traveling to Beijing, Shenzhen and other cities and acting in different roles, I had the opportunity to experience different aspects of traditional Chinese culture, including calligraphy, and see the real China for myself," he added.

Qadir has so far starred in three movies and features in several upcoming TV dramas. "From walk-on parts to leading roles, I want to show the audience the real China and show the sincere friendship between China and Pakistan," he said.

In 2019, Qadir founded a media company in Xi'an specializing in the production of movies, short videos and livestream shows.

> From walk-on parts to leading roles, I want to show the audience the real China and show the sincere friendship between China and Pakistan."
>
> **Anees Qadir,** Pakistani actor in Xi'an, Shaanxi province

In the future, he plans to take the stories of the Gwadar Port and the Karakoram Highway to the big screen. "As projects that are part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, they benefit our two peoples and are a testament to the selfless devotion of workers, some of whom even laid down their lives. This is worth recording," he said.

XINHUA

COMMENT

Editorials

Europe should be wary of the Biden administration leading it further astray

Anyone taking an objective look at international relations cannot but raise their eyebrows at the latest plan proposed by the European Union to reduce what the bloc sees is its economic dependence on China while increasing its political dependency on the United States.

The policy adjustment, or "re-calibrating" of China policy as EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell calls it, places greater emphasis on China as an economic competitor. The recalibration received broad backing from the bloc's 27 foreign ministers when they met in Stockholm on Friday. They will now work out what they think it actually entails before presenting it to EU leaders who are expected to discuss China at a summit next month.

Borrell said that the EU had to learn from the "strategic mistake" it made in becoming too dependent on Russian gas. No matter what term the EU picks to describe how it will steer its relationship with China — European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has previously called for "de-risking" — there is no denying the fact that the EU will be ditching the decades-old mutually beneficial partnership that has served both sides' best interests, in favor of an ideologically driven confrontational approach driven by Washington.

Some have portrayed China as an economic threat to Europe's security and called for the bloc to distance itself from the country. But others, such as Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjárto, remain clear-minded, cautioning against turning the EU into an "anti-China" bloc. They call for strategic cooperation instead of systemic competition between the two sides. "We don't agree at all with the way certain European countries want to define China as a kind of systemic rival," Szijjárto said in Stockholm on Friday.

It would be pointless for Western European countries to want to sever the economic links between China and Europe, given the "clear division of labor between East and West". "Neither works without the other," he said. As if to prove his point, French President Emmanuel Macron announced on Friday that Chinese group XTC New Energy Materials will set up a joint venture with France's Orano in the battery sector in the northern French port city of Dunkirk for an expected investment of 1.5 billion euros ($1.63 billion). The venture is expected to create around 1,700 jobs.

China has, and will always see Europe as a comprehensive strategic partner and support it to play a more active role in the international arena.

Europe has undoubtedly been rattled by the conflict in Ukraine. But it should recognize its own role in what has transpired. By allowing the US to use it as the rack on which to stretch Russia to breaking point, Europe has inflicted harm and troubles on itself.

It would be detrimental to the interests of both the EU and China, if the EU were to let its cooperative relations with China also be hijacked by Washington.

US the real perpetrator of economic coercion

Non-market practices and economic coercion are the terms Washington often employs when it is pointing an accusing finger at other countries including China. It is absurd that it should do so, given that such expressions best describe what it has been doing.

Despite this, it still plans to use such phrases in meeting with the European Union later this month, in which the two sides will talk about ways to contain the rise of China.

Given the frequent visits to China by leaders of major EU countries in the past months and the close economic cooperation between China and EU countries, it is clear that Washington is trying to estrange the EU from China.

When it comes to the topic of non-market practices, it is well-known all over the world that China's reform and opening-up in the late 1970s turned the country into a market economy with its own characteristics. That transformation has brought China to where it is now. It is that transformation which has also ensured the Chinese economy's integration with the global market.

China has never changed its reform and opening-up policies and it has been making efforts to open its door wider and create an even better business environment for foreign investors.

It is the US that has abused market rules in its dealings with other countries by taking for granted its position as the world's sole superpower. It is the US that has bullied other countries by taking unilateral actions in raising tariffs or imposing economic sanctions. It is the US that is desperate to suppress China's development in order to maintain its position as the world's sole superpower.

When it comes to the alleged economic coercion of China, the example that is cited is Lithuania whose exports to China the Chinese authorities are said to have blocked. However, it is Lithuania that is responsible for its problems with China, as it has failed to abide by the one-China principle that is the prerequisite for bilateral relations.

Washington has frequently practiced economic coercion in its economic relations with other countries. By politicizing economic issues, the US has frequently imposed economic sanctions against other countries. Washington has also abused the concept of national security to prohibit the development of other countries.

Its attempt to coordinate with the EU on export controls for semiconductors and other goods at their meeting to be held later this month is an apt example. It is a kind of bullying that is meant to keep China and other emerging economies at the lower end of the global industry chain.

What Washington has been doing has disrupted and will further disrupt the global supply and industry chains. It is selfish and callous of Washington to do a disservice to the development of the world economy in a bid to contain the rise of China and the development of emerging economies.

Washington still meddling in Hong Kong affairs

A US congressional report issued late last week that called for sanctions against 29 Hong Kong judges involved in the city's national security cases represents the latest attempt by the United States to weaken the rule of law in the special administrative region.

The report by the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China claimed that the National Security Law enforced in Hong Kong in 2020 in response to "pro-democracy demonstrations" had "created a parallel legal system that weakens judicial independence and strips criminal defendants of basic due process protections".

The claim does not hold water. The so-called pro-democracy demonstrations were nothing but social chaos orchestrated by Washington for the purpose of turning Hong Kong into a bridgehead for its China containment strategy. There is only one legal system in the SAR. It respects the legal rights and interests of all criminal defendants, and safeguards peace, stability and the rule of law in the city. It is the US that wants to make its own will "a parallel" set of rules for the city to follow.

The reason why the US lawmakers see the National Security Law, which was made, revised and executed following the will of the Hong Kong people, as a thorn in the flesh is because the law has effectively plugged the institutional loopholes the US had long taken advantage of to implant, direct and support its pawns in the SAR to do its bidding.

That order could be quickly restored in the city shortly after the law was enforced testifies to its effectiveness.

The US legislature body's issuing of such a baseless report constitutes a grave intervention in China's internal affairs, and also shows the US' reluctance to accept the fact that its good old days when it could waywardly manipulate the situation in Hong Kong through remote control of its puppets are gone.

The US lawmakers' appeal to the US government to sanction the Hong Kong judges who faithfully fulfill their duties in cases related to national security exposes their shamelessness in believing that the US government can interfere in the other countries' domestic judicial affairs.

Making other countries' business its own, and making its own business, if not failures, others' have always been a tactic employed by the US to maintain its global hegemony.

To truly show their concern for people in Hong Kong, the US lawmakers should suggest the US government immediately cease all interventions in the Hong Kong affairs, and abolish all the sanctions it has imposed on the city that directly harm the interests of the Hong Kong people.

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huixin Dongjie Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254(0)20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Jin Ding

Opinion Line

Regional integrated development key to China's path to modernization

The Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region should make greater efforts to take the region's coordinated development to a new level and make it an example of Chinese modernization, the central authorities said in a recent meeting.

In early 2014, the central authorities issued a strategy to coordinate the development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei to create a model with a better economic structure, cleaner environment and improved public services. Two "new wings", the Tongzhou district of Beijing and Xiongan New Area in Hebei, were built to realize this goal.

Tongzhou and Xiongan should properly handle relations and work together to rid Beijing of its "big city malaise". According to the Hebei provincial government, China's centrally administered State-owned enterprises had set up more than 140 subsidiaries and branches in Xiongan as of January, and more enterprises are expected to be relocated there. The relocation of the second batch of Beijing's administrative institutions and enterprises to Tongzhou will also be speeded up.

To promote its coordinated development, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region should be given full play as one of the three major drivers of China's high-quality development. Being home to a large number of first-class universities and research talents, the region enjoys a solid foundation for innovation. This role will enable the region to set an example for achieving self-reliance and self-improvement in high-level science and technology and promote innovation.

The coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region needs to not only take into consideration regional differences while paying attention to complementary advantages. Beijing's edge in sci-tech innovation should be combined with Tianjin's strength in advanced manufacturing research and development to make breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields, and the two cities should help Hebei to better accommodate industries transferred from the two cities.

The ultimate purpose of promoting the coordinated development of the region is to improve people's well-being and facilitate common prosperity. While making greater efforts to promote coordinated development, the region should learn more about the needs of the people, accelerate the joint contribution and sharing of public services, and promote the sharing of better education and medical resources, to solve the interests and concerns of the people and improve their sense of gain, happiness, and security.

— XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

Speculators, not scientists, driving AI rollout

Google recently announced the debut of its artificial intelligence-backed large language model, PaLM2, which, it claims, surpasses the existing GPT-4 in certain aspects and will serve people better.

The move challenges the open letter issued in March by the non-profit Future of Life Institute, which called for pausing all giant AI experiments for six months and to use the time to implement a set of shared safety protocols for advanced AI design and development. However, the sooner a company accomplishes its research, the bigger its market share is going to be. According to US-based Next Move Strategy Consulting, the $100 billion AI market in the US alone is likely to grow 20 times by 2030, while that of the whole world might even reach $1.85 trillion during the same period.

Any company executive knows that no financer would, therefore, risk halting work for that long. That's the biggest dilemma in the whole affair: technologists might have realized the risks involved in AI's fast evolution, but those putting their money into the research are only driven by profits. It is, therefore, easy to persuade those behind academic research, but hard to persuade entrepreneurs whose job is to make profits. Even if some entrepreneurs are willing to suspend AI research for six months, their rivals may not do so and so they risk losing their market share to rivals.

The way to solving this problem lies not in persuading entrepreneurs to halt research but in drafting regulations to minimize their worries about the risks. Calling lawmakers to make such a regulation might be a good idea, to ensure a level playing field for all players.

The Future of Life Institute, which called for "an AI pause", would do well to direct their call to those investing in the research than to the scientists, so that such rules are drafted sooner.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Rationalize local govts' investment competition

Investment from outside of a locality promotes the development of its economy and industry. But some local governments are overstretching their pro-investment policies to provide "extraordinary preferential treatments" that they cannot afford in the long run to investors, in a bid to win out in the competition for investment.

The practice not only increases the burden on local governments, but also encourages the speculation of some investors, prompting them to focus on quick returns.

With the competition for investment becoming increasingly fierce, the aforementioned practice must be rectified, otherwise it will turn regional development into a zero-sum game between neighboring towns, damaging the overall economic development environment.

For example, in order to compete for a big project, some places tend to offer "extraordinary concessions" in land use and tax reductions, and provide generous subsidies of various kinds. That makes the process a de facto auction of the projects.

Before the project proves its profitability, the bidders are doing nothing but upping the ante on transforming investment promotion into a gamble with taxpayers' money at the costs of fairness in market competition. That increases the risks for the winners in the "auction", as many local governments are running on debt already, and shakes the foundation for the rule-of-law business environment the government vows to form.

Therefore, the central authorities should take concrete actions to address the issue which cannot be tackled by the local governments themselves. In a guideline policy the central authorities issued in June last year, it was stipulated that grassroots governments should gradually clear up the subsidies and abolish policies that interfere with the market and are linked to tax revenue. It also calls for the elimination of policies that impede the unification of the market and fair competition, addressing local protectionism, market segmentation and insider trading, in order to prevent vicious competition for investment.

It should be borne in mind that some projects of the so-called emerging industries and high technology have proved to be a disguise for speculators to swindle local governments' subsidies, a source of kickback for some insiders in the government as some cases indicate.

There should be assessments and supervision of investment projects by means of an effective project and investment evaluation system. That will help local governments to see how the local economy will benefit from any investment project, whether the local economy can afford the loss to be caused by the possible failure of the project in the future, as well as an accountability system for the officials responsible for granting subsidies to projects that turn out to be not worth it.

— BEIJING NEWS

VIEWS

Mallika Sachdeva

China's recovery drives Asian economy

The stress in the global banking system is leading some to draw parallels with the last banking crisis. There are, of course, clear differences around the nature of the banking stress itself. While the 2006-08 crisis was more explicitly a credit crisis, this time it has been more an interest rate risk crisis.

Smaller banks are struggling to compete on deposits, with front-end rates having been hiked sharply, and are also facing sharp losses on their fixed-income assets, which the withdrawal of deposits is exposing.

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis built slowly, with housing prices beginning to fall in 2006, hedge funds saddled with subprime investments beginning to fail in 2007, and fullblown banking failures in 2008. Despite clear signs of stress by mid-2007, Asian currencies actually continued to rally for a few quarters, with over 5 percent gains on an average Asian foreign exchange index from July 2007-Mar 2008, before a sharp turn and over 15 percent losses in the year thereafter.

There was of course variation in how Asian currencies performed even in the midst of the crisis. We note that from Summer 2007-End 2008, the Japanese yen, Chinese yuan and Singapore dollar actually managed to deliver net positive gains, while the Republic of Korea won, Indian rupee and the Indonesian rupiah lost the most ground.

Crucial differences in the Asian FX backdrop

There are a lot of areas to mine when it comes to parallels with history. We identify a number of crucial differences between 2007-08 and today that suggest that Asian currencies are likely to fare much better this time:

1. Foreign positioning in Asian assets is much lighter, with considerable outflows from Asian equities in recent years in contrast to the years of inflows from 2002-07.

In the five years before Summer 2007, Asian equities had attracted $136 billion of inflows, or over 1 percent of the GDP of the countries covered, while over the past 5 years, Asian equities have lost $120 billion, or 0.3 percent of GDP. Foreign investors are simply far less invested and exposed, having refrained from building positions in the last few years.

2. Corporate positioning is also long US dollar now, unlike short US dollar in 2007.

Asian corporates have hoarded US dollar deposits in recent years, in contrast to the heavy short US dollar forward positions in 2007. The year preceding 2007 had seen a consistent downtrend in US dollar /Asia, with domestic corporates actively positioned short US dollar.

3. Less risks of US dollar funding stress.

The emergence of banking system risks have been accompanied by far less US dollar stress this time. While US dollar funding premiums have risen, it is well below levels seen in 2020, and just a fraction of what occurred in 2008. This is partly because foreign investors and corporates are much less short US dollar to begin with and thus the scramble for US dollar has also been more limited. But it is also partly due to higher levels of foreign exchange reserves, and access to emergency US dollar liquidity from the Fed via the foreign and international monetary authorities' repo facility, which appears to have been tapped recently for up to $60 billion, albeit it is unclear how much Asian central banks have played a role.

4. China's expected strong recovery this year and next will provide an offset, particularly for ASEAN where some countries are more leveraged to China over US growth now, especially service exporters.

The Chinese economy is expected to accelerate from this year itself, given the reopening and property market reversal, with Deutsche Bank House View expecting 6.0 percent and 6.3 percent growth in 2023 and 2024. This should provide a helpful offset, particularly to Asian economies that are more leveraged to Chinese than US growth.

We look at a simple correlation between domestic manufacturing PMIs and China versus US PMIs. We find that a number of ASEAN economies — Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam — are all more correlated to China than US growth now, while North Asian economies could face a bigger drag from the US than lift from China. While there are clear relative implications for manufacturing strength, we think the bright spot of the Chinese recovery will be in services consumption, with Thailand set to benefit the most from this trend as Chinese tourism spending resumes.

5. Asian currencies are much more attractively valued.

In Summer 2007, Asian currencies were decidedly overvalued by an average of 13 percent on our Trade Weighted Index trade-based models. In comparison, Asian currencies on average are now slightly undervalued.

6. Most striking similarity between then and now will be around Japan and yen's strength.

Even in 2006, the Bank of Japan tightened after the Fed had delivered its last hike and cracks were beginning to appear. But while the last BoJ tightening cycle was very short-lived, and quickly reversed, we think this one will have more virtuous and sustainable domestic drivers. In 2006, when the BoJ lifted rates, core inflation was still negative and headline inflation less than 1 percent. In contrast, Japan appears to have made a more meaningful exit from its low inflation regime this time, with Shunto wage increases the largest since the early 1990s in March 2023.

Taking the above factors together, we would note a weaker case to play this banking crisis via long US dollar/Asia positions compared with 2007-08. In contrast to then, real positioning appears very light with domestic corporates sitting on long US dollar and foreign investors having avoided building Asian exposure in recent years. Asian currencies are also mostly cheap, the risk of US dollar funding stress is much lower, and China is recovering strongly.

Our relative currency preferences mostly reflect the drivers discussed above. We note that exports from markets such as the Republic of Korea have been very poor, and a slowing US economy could add to the drag; Malaysia is meanwhile more leveraged to China's growth recovery. We see Thailand getting a boost later in the year from a greater return of Chinese tourism. We also see growth and monetary policy divergence leading to strength in the Chinese yuan against the US dollar this year.

The author is Deutsche Bank's Head of Asia Macro Strategy.
The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Gulchehra Rikhsieva

Sino-Uzbek education cooperation creates opportunities

Cooperation on education between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the People's Republic of China is based on the education cooperation agreement signed by the Uzbek Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education and the Chinese Ministry of Education on Nov 8, 1999. Along with this, Sino-Uzbek education cooperation is also based on a number of other key documents.

Every year, China grants scholarships to some students under the framework of interstate cooperation program of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which allows them to study in Chinese universities. Due to such grants and scholarships, students travel to China not only to learn the Chinese language and attend college, but also to gain experience as interns in institutions and organizations, and receive advanced training in the field of education and economics. Uzbek students can also seek scholarships to attend college in China through the Confucius Institute.

The Confucius Institutes in Uzbekistan have helped thousands of Uzbek citizens to learn the Chinese language, earn HSK level certificates (standardized test to test foreigners' Chinese language proficiency), and get better acquainted with Chinese culture. Many clubs and groups that regularly organize calligraphy, Chinese cuisine, tai chi or other competitions, or host cultural and educational events have also played an important role in popularizing the Chinese language and culture in Uzbekistan.

In particular, volunteer teachers have had a big hand in popularizing the Chinese language and culture, as they, along with local experts, have not only shared their knowledge with others but also introduced new ideas and methods of Chinese studies to the Confucius Institutes. For instance, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Confucius Institute at the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies introduced new activities with the help of eight volunteer teachers from China.

While the number of higher educational institutions in Uzbekistan where the Chinese language is taught as a first or second foreign language is growing, the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies remains the base of higher education in terms of Chinese studies. Also, the Confucius Institute at the university is the first of its kind in Central Asia. In fact, the university will celebrate 70 years of the founding of a school of Chinese studies later this year.

A landmark event in the history of the university was the opening of the Department of Chinese Studies in 2014. Its goal is to fully realize the educational and scientific potential of students and promote cooperation with Chinese universities and organizations.

For the past three academic years, volunteer teachers have been teaching students at the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, and interacting with teachers in the Department of Chinese Philology of the university to improve the teaching methods and conversational practice. While 22 Chinese specialists have taught students in the university, experts from partner universities in China have conducted online classes for undergraduate and postgraduate students in the past three years.

In the 2021-22 academic year, there were 72 Chinese study groups in fields as varied as Chinese literature, philology, Chinese history, Chinese philosophy, journalism, economics and political science. At present, there are 770 undergraduate and 88 postgraduate students, while the number of doctoral candidates is 15.

From the 2022-23 academic year, postgraduate Chinese students are being taught under the "foreign economic activity (foreign trade)" program framework. And over the past three academic years, about 20 Chinese nationals have earned bachelor's, master's or doctoral degrees in the language courses of the university.

Besides, associations such as the Chinese Language and Culture Fan Club, Young Economists Club, Young Translators Club and the School for Young Political Scientists organize extracurricular activities for students so they can spend their free time in useful pursuits.

The university has also established ties with Chinese universities such as the Shanghai International Studies University, Hunan University, Tianjin Polytechnic University, Xi'an International Studies University and the Northwestern Minzu University.

Last year saw another landmark event in Sino-Uzbek cooperation on education with the opening of the Uzbek-Chinese Research Center at the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies. Among the center's priorities are creating monographs, promoting the study of China's domestic and foreign policies and economic practices, and the role of the Silk Road, as well as analyzing the prospects of Sino-Uzbek cooperation, which could give rise to new generation textbooks and electronic apps, and encourage more young researchers.

Undoubtedly, cooperation between Uzbek and Chinese universities and organizations will create more opportunities for people who are fluent in the Chinese language and well-versed in Chinese studies. This, in turn, will open up new horizons of cooperation between the two countries.

This is the result of the development of bilateral relations in recent years, and the upcoming visit of the President of Uzbekistan to China will in every way contribute to the development of relations in the field of education between our countries in the future.

The author is the rector of Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan.
The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Kang Bing

The author is former deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily.
kangbing@chinadaily.com.cn

It's time to fight the burdensome betrothal money

Editor's note: *The decline in the marriage rate is related to the rising cost of getting married, especially the high housing prices in some big cities and the increasing betrothal money a bridegroom has to give to the bride's parents, writes a veteran journalist with China Daily.*

Betrothal money (or *pin jin*) required by a bride's parents has long been a financial burden for many bridegrooms and their families. Traditionally, *pin jin*, or the bride's price, is a practice in which the groom's family offers the bride's family an amount of money as a symbol of respect.

But nowadays, as reports show, the betrothal money could be as high as 300,000 yuan ($43,115) in the more developed eastern region of China, and about 200,000 yuan in the less-developed western region. The sum is equivalent to an individual's five-seven years' income in a city and perhaps 10 years' earnings in rural areas.

After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the first law that China passed was the marriage law, which stressed gender equality and stipulated that a person has the right to choose his or her life partner instead of marrying the one chosen by his/her parents.

Although *pin jin* was not mentioned in the law, it was presumed that with youths choosing their life partners, the betrothal money custom would die a natural death. The fact, however, is that the *pin jin* custom survived, especially in rural areas. But the deals were reached secretly and the sum became smaller.

And according to data from other sources, more and more people are choosing not to marry at all for multiple reasons, though I believe the betrothal money and housing precondition are two of the most important ones.

The *pin jin* custom was more or less abandoned in urban areas till the turn of the century. I am among the lucky ones who did not have to pay the betrothal money to my wife's family when I tied the knot in the mid-1980s. During those days, the bride's parents, in many cases, required the groom's family to provide the newly-wed couple with necessary furniture, electronic appliances and a separate room to ensure they led a happy life.

But the *pin jin* custom made a strong comeback about two decades ago under the cover of traditional practice. Neither the government nor society paid much attention to the revival of *pin jin*, probably because such deals were struck between two families and the betrothal money was usually small, and neither side broke any laws. This prompted the "betrothal money business" to grow. Traditional material gifts were first replaced with cash. Then the amount of money started increasing. The amounts mentioned above are those normally accepted practice, though in some extreme cases, the required sum could reach 1 million yuan.

In cities such as Beijing, *pin jin* may be a rarely heard phenomenon, but that does not mean it's easy for a young man to marry the woman of his choice. Reportedly, for a man to marry the woman of his choice, he or his family usually has to buy or have a separate apartment — which could cost 5 million yuan in Beijing where the average monthly salary is about 6,000 yuan.

High betrothal money and the unreasonable housing demand have prevented many couples from tying the knot. I know two men in their late 30s who couldn't marry the women they loved because they could not afford to buy or rent an apartment in Beijing.

Official data for 2022 show that China's population has begun decreasing and that people are getting married at an older age. And according to data from other sources, more and more people are choosing not to marry at all for multiple reasons, though I believe the betrothal money and housing precondition are two of the most important ones.

It may be difficult for lawmakers to pass a law banning *pin jin*. But something has to be done to curb this unhealthy trend which could have a negative effect on China's efforts to raise the total fertility rate and ensure social stability in the long run.

In fact, some lower-tier cities have introduced regulations limiting the sum of betrothal money — between 60,000 yuan and 100,000 yuan. But they are very cautious when it comes to strictly enforcing the regulations for fear of being accused of violating citizens' rights.

So it is up to us, society as a whole, to condemn this ugly trend. And the media, including social media, can contribute to the cause by helping develop an atmosphere in which asking for huge amounts of betrothal money would be considered a shame.

WORLD

Turkiye polls heading for historic runoff

Erdogan edges ahead of challenger but fails to secure first-round win

ANKARA, Turkiye — Turkiye's presidential election will be decided in a runoff, election officials said on Monday, after a night of high drama showed President Recep Tayyip Erdogan edging ahead of his secular rival but failing to secure a first-round win.

The May 28 second-round vote will determine if a NATO ally that straddles Europe and Asia but borders Syria and Iran remains under Erdogan's governing or runs into a different path led by his main rival, opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

This year's election largely centered on domestic issues such as the economy, civil rights and a February earthquake that killed more than 50,000 people. But Western countries and foreign investors also awaited the outcome because of Erdogan's unorthodox leadership of the economy and his often mercurial but successful efforts to put Turkiye at the center of international negotiations.

Preliminary results showed Erdogan won 49.5 percent of the vote, while Kilicdaroglu grabbed 44.9 percent, and the third candidate, Sinan Ogan, received 5.2 percent, said Ahmet Yener, the head of the Supreme Electoral Board, Turkiye's election authority.

The remaining uncounted votes were not enough to tip Erdogan into outright victory, even if they all broke for him, Yener said. In the last presidential election in 2018, Erdogan won in the first round, with more than 52 percent of the vote.

The president painted Sunday's vote as a victory both for himself and the country.

"That the election results have not been finalized doesn't change the fact that the nation has chosen us," Erdogan, 69, told supporters early on Monday.

He said he would respect the nation's decision.

Kilicdaroglu, 74, the candidate of a six-party alliance, sounded hopeful, tweeting around the time the runoff was announced: "Don't lose hope. ... We will get up and win this election together."

The Supreme Electoral Board said it was providing numbers to competing political parties "instantly" and would make the results public once the count was completed and finalized.

Howard Eissenstat, an associate professor of Middle East history and politics at St. Lawrence University in New York, said Erdogan was likely to have an advantage in a runoff because the president's party was likely to do better in a parliamentary election, also held on Sunday. Voters would not want a "divided government", he said.

Erdogan has governed Turkiye as either prime minister or president since 2003.

In the run-up to the election, opinion surveys had indicated the leader narrowly trailed his challenger.

Omer Celik, a spokesman for Erdogan's Justice and Development Party, in turn, accused the opposition of "an attempt to assassinate the national will". He called the opposition claims "irresponsible".

Candidates' visions

While Erdogan hopes to win a five-year term that would take him well into his third decade as Turkiye's leader, Kilicdaroglu campaigned on promises to repair an economy battered by high inflation and currency devaluation.

Voters also elected lawmakers to fill Turkiye's 600-seat parliament. Erdogan's ruling party alliance was hovering around 49.3 percent, while Kilicdaroglu's Nation Alliance had around 35.2 percent, and support for a pro-Kurdish party stood above 10 percent, Anadolu news agency reported.

More than 64 million people, including overseas voters, were eligible to vote and nearly 89 percent voted.

Erdogan, along with the United Nations, helped mediate a deal with Russia and Ukraine that allowed Ukrainian grain to reach the rest of the world from Black Sea ports despite the continuing conflict between Moscow and Kyiv. The agreement, which is implemented by a center based in Istanbul, is set to expire in days, and Turkiye hosted talks last week to keep it alive.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

A resident follows the election results on Sunday at his home, which was damaged in February's earthquakes, in Hatay, Turkiye. CAN EROK / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Highway horror

A picture released by the Mexican Army shows the site of an accident between a truck and a van on the Zaragoza-Hidalgo highway that left at least 26 people dead and several others injured, in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, on Sunday. MEXICAN ARMY / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

UK urges tighter controls on immigration

By **JULIAN SHEA** in London
julian@mail.chinadailyuk.com

The United Kingdom must not "forget how to do things for ourselves" and train the people it needs to fill job vacancies, rather than rely on immigrants to take the roles, the country's Home Secretary Suella Braverman has said.

With figures to be published soon expected to show that net migration hit a record high last year, Braverman, who has been one of the most vocal supporters of tighter controls on immigration to the UK, told the National Conservatism Conference that the government needs to stand by its pledge to reduce migrant numbers.

Braverman previously served as home secretary in the brief reign of former prime minister Liz Truss last fall, before resigning over a data protection breach, but in her resignation letter she made a point of saying she had "serious concerns about this government's commitment to honoring manifesto commitments, such as reducing overall migration numbers and stopping illegal migration".

Reappointed by Truss's successor Rishi Sunak, she has maintained her strong stance on the issue, particularly through highly controversial plans to send failed asylum-seekers to Rwanda, and reinforced that position with this speech.

'Not xenophobic'

"It's not xenophobic to say that mass and rapid migration is unsustainable in terms of housing supply, service and community relations," she said.

Braverman was a high-profile supporter of Brexit, despite having made use of the European Union's Erasmus international education exchange program to study at the prestigious Sorbonne University in Paris.

Braverman had "voted and campaigned for Brexit because I wanted Britain to control migration so that we all have a say on what works for our country", she said in the speech.

"We mustn't forget how to do things for ourselves … there is no good reason why we can't train up enough HGV (heavy goods vehicle) drivers, butchers or fruit pickers. Brexit enables us to build a high-skilled, high-wage economy that is less dependent on low-skilled foreign labor."

This month the ruling Conservative Party suffered substantial losses across the country in local elections, which many observers interpret as being as much of a public judgement on national politics as it is about issues at the local level.

With a general election expected at some point in the next 18 months, those results have left the Conservatives looking at what they need to do to win back votes, and this speech from such a high-profile member of the government would suggest they are going to double down on immigration in the hope it is a potential vote-winner.

Off-grid solar lights up Indonesia's villages

LAINDEHA, Indonesia — As Tamar Ana Jawa wove a red sarong in the fading sunlight, her neighbor switched on a light bulb dangling from the sloping tin roof. It was just one bulb powered by a small solar panel, but in this remote village that means a lot.

In some of the world's most remote places, off-grid solar systems are bringing villagers like Jawa more hours in the day and more income.

Before the village got electricity less than two years ago, the day ended when the sun went down. Villagers in Laindeha, on the island of Sumba in eastern Indonesia, would set aside the mats they were weaving or coffee they were sorting to sell at the market as the light faded.

A few families who could afford them would start noisy generators that rumbled into the night, emitting plumes of smoke.

That has changed since grassroots social enterprise projects have brought small, individual solar panel systems to Laindeha and villages across the island.

For Jawa, it means much-needed extra income. "It used to be dark at night, now it's bright until morning," the 30-year-old mother of two said, arranging and pushing red threads at the loom. "So tonight I work ... to pay for the children."

A worker installs a solar panel on the roof of a shop in Laindeha village, Indonesia, on March 22. DITA ALANGKARA / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Around the world, hundreds of millions of people live in communities without regular access to power, and off-grid solar systems are bringing limited access to electricity to some places years before power grids can ever reach them.

About 775 million people globally lacked access to electricity last year, according to the International Energy Agency. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are home to some of the largest populations without access to electricity.

In Indonesia there are still more than half a million people living in places the grid does not reach. While barriers remain, experts say off-grid solar programs on the island could be replicated across the vast archipelago nation, bringing renewable energy to remote communities.

"Off-grid solar there plays an important role, in that it will deliver clean electricity directly to those who are unelectrified," said Daniel Kurniawan, a solar policy analyst at the Institute for Essential Services Reform in Jakarta.

But for now, villagers like Jawa said the solar systems are making a big difference. "I'm grateful for this lamp," she said, sitting at the loom and nodding toward the hanging bulb. "It will be bright all night."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Bells toll on anniversary of Buffalo massacre

BUFFALO, New York — A bell chimed 13 times as people paused for a moment of silence on Sunday to remember the 10 people killed and three wounded in a racist attack at a Buffalo supermarket one year ago.

Mayor Byron Brown read the names of the victims outside Tops Friendly Market, where a self-declared white supremacist gunman opened fire on May 14 last year. Politicians including State Governor Kathy Hochul and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer also attended the remembrance, which fell on Mother's Day.

"It's a beautiful day. It's Mother's Day," Hochul said. "And the cruel irony behind the fact is a day we celebrate a life that comes into this world, making someone a mother, is also a day we're here to think about those who are no longer with us. It's hard. It's been a really hard year."

In the year since the shooting, relatives of the victims have spoken before Congress about white supremacy and gun reform and organized events to address food insecurity that worsened when the market, the neighborhood's only grocery store, was closed for two months.

United States President Joe Biden honored the lives of those killed in Buffalo in an op-ed published on Sunday in USA Today. He called on Congress and state legislative leaders to act by banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, requiring background checks for all gun sales and repealing gun manufacturers' immunity from liability.

Gun control organizations and advocates held nearly 200 events nationwide over the weekend, calling on Congress to reinstate a bipartisan assault weapons ban.

In Buffalo, Wayne Jones, whose mother Celestine Chaney, 65, died in the attack, urged the city and its institutions to keep on investing in the area and its residents even after the anniversary events are over. That is why he is willing "to keep opening up this wound that I have" and talk about it, he said.

Inside the store fountains flank a poem dedicated to the victims. The store was closed on Sunday in remembrance of the shooting.

Gun violence

More than 215 mass shootings have occurred in the US this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive, an NGO.

Two people were killed and five others injured on Saturday in a shooting in Yuma, a US-Mexico border city in Arizona, authorities said on Sunday.

Police responded to a report of shots fired in a neighborhood at about 11 pm and found several people with gunshot wounds, the Yuma Police Department said in a news release.

Two men aged 19 and 20 were pronounced dead at a local hospital shortly after being sent there, it said. A third victim, a 16-year-old male, was sent to the hospital with life-threatening injuries and later flown to Phoenix, the state capital, for further treatment.

The other victims, ages 15, 19, 18, and 16, had non-life-threatening injuries.

An investigation was underway, officials said, and no suspects were in custody at the time of the news release.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Despite resistance, Portugal set to legalize euthanasia

By **EARLE GALE** in London
earle@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Religious and human rights groups in Portugal are vowing to resist new legislation that allows euthanasia for some people with terminal illnesses.

The legislation, which the Parliament approved on Friday after a lengthy process and much opposition in the nation of 10.3 million, legalizes euthanasia for people with incurable diseases who are in severe and prolonged pain.

People will also need to demand their lives be ended and be considered mentally competent to make such a decision, the Portuguese newspaper Diario de Noticias reported.

Many people in the Roman Catholic country strongly disapprove of suicide, which their religion considers a sin, and the country's devoutly religious president, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, was among the legislation's prominent opponents.

Lawmakers have approved the bill four times during the past three years, but each time the president has blocked it. This time, after Parliament approved a "definitive version", lawmakers said they will not respect any form of presidential veto.

Isabel Moreira, a socialist lawmaker and strong supporter of the legislation, said after the law was passed by 129 votes to 81 that its adoption will now be unstoppable.

"We are confirming a law that has already been approved several times by a huge majority," she told Agence France-Presse. "We have at last come to the end of a long battle. ... The time has come for the majority of the Parliament to be respected."

Rebelo de Sousa had earlier tried to stall the latest version of the bill by asking Parliament to first include in it a definition of who should be allowed to say whether or not a patient has the capacity to participate in assisted suicide and who, therefore, would not be eligible for euthanasia, but Parliament treated it as a delaying tactic and refused to amend the bill for a fifth time.

The president now has one week to put the new law into effect.

The law will allow people to request doctors take their life in cases where they are terminally ill, in extreme pain, mentally competent, and when "medically assisted suicide is impossible, due to a physical disability of the patient".

The right to euthanasia will only extend to Portuguese citizens and to people who are legally resident in the country, blocking the prospect of people traveling to the country to avail of the service.

Paulo Santos, a member of the pro-euthanasia group Right To Die With Dignity, told AFP, "The adoption of this law has been relatively fast compared with other big countries."

Despite lawmakers approving the law, doctors could now refuse to participate in euthanasia, he said, as many did with abortions after they were legalized in 2007.

"There's a good chance euthanasia will lead to even stronger resistance," he said.

The new law, which should come into force by the fall, means Portugal joins Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain as European nations that have legalized euthanasia. Elsewhere, it is permitted in countries including Australia, Canada, Colombia and New Zealand.

WORLD

Thailand casts vote for change

Opposition parties claim majority; prime minister to be decided in July

BANGKOK — Thailand's opposition parties raked in most of the 500 seats available in the race for the House of Representatives, with the results on Monday suggesting that voters are ready for change.

Early indications were that opposition parties had won the majority of seats in the lower house of Parliament, the Election Commission said.

It came as officials said on Monday that the Thai economy had grown 2.7 percent in the first quarter thanks to a steady recovery in tourism and strong consumer confidence, offsetting sluggish exports.

The National Economic and Social Development Council has forecast the economy to grow between 2.7 and 3.7 percent this year. The January-March expansion marked a pickup from 1.4 percent in the previous quarter, the council said.

"Our domestic economy does not have any major problems. Consumption and the tourism sector continue to strengthen," Danucha Pichayanan, the council secretary, told reporters.

The council has said that an incoming government must prioritize boosting exports and finding new potential markets by speeding up free-trade negotiations.

Monday's vote was "people saying that we want change", according to Saowanee T. Alexander, a professor at Ubon Ratchathani University in northeastern Thailand.

With more than 99 percent of ballots counted on Monday, Move Forward appeared to have a small edge over Pheu Thai, whose leaders conceded on Sunday that they might not finish on top after a voter turnout of about 39 million, at about 75 percent.

The official result of the election is pending verification by the Election Commission, which is due in 60 days.

The Move Forward party, with a strong base among young voters, is seeking to form a coalition government with other opposition parties.

Pita Limjaroenrat, the 42-year-old leader of the Move Forward party, said on Monday that he has invited Pheu Thai and several other parties previously in the opposition to form the government.

"I have congratulated Pheu Thai leader, Paetongtarn (Shinawatra), for her hard-fought campaign and have invited her to join the coalition. And that includes other five parties in the previous opposition," he told a news conference.

Pita tweeted that he is ready to bring about change as the country's 30th prime minister. "Whether you agree or disagree with me, I will be your prime minister. Whether you have voted for me or not, I will serve you," he wrote.

The Pheu Thai party said in a statement that it has accepted the invitation but Paetongtarn said the two parties have yet to start negotiations.

The party of incumbent Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha held the fifth spot in the constituency vote and third in the party-preference tally. Prayut told reports late on Sunday that he respects the election results and will continue to serve the country no matter what his role will be.

Challenges ahead

Sunday's winner is not assured of the right to form the new government. A joint session of the 500-seat House of Representatives will be held with the 250-member Senate in July to select the prime minister. The winner must attain at least 376 of the combined 750 seats.

Analysts say a lot can still happen before the commission declares the results valid, a process that can take up to 75 days and will almost certainly include legal challenges.

Alexander cautioned that the situation remains "very unpredictable" and the results could be unilaterally affected by the commission, which previously disqualified opposition parties or otherwise undermined challenges to the conservative establishment.

She said the Bhumjaithai Party, which came in third, could be a "swing vote" as the combined Move Forward and Pheu Thai seats may not be enough for a majority coalition. Bhumjaithai controls a large bloc of votes in the northeast and helped put the military-backed coalition into power.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

A voter looks at a poster of candidates for the general election at a polling station in Bangkok on Sunday. THOMAS MARESCA / NEWSCOM

Residents shop at a market in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Sunday after a cease-fire ended five days of deadly fighting. SAID KHATIB / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Life returning to normal after Gaza truce

GAZA/JERUSALEM — Life on both sides of the Gaza Strip border seemed to be returning to normal on Sunday after an Egyptian-mediated cease-fire halted five days of fighting between Israel and Islamic Jihad.

The Israeli Defense Ministry announced in a statement the reopening of the crossing of Kerem Shalom for cargo trucks and the Erez crossing, the only pedestrian passage between Gaza and Israel, after a six-day closure.

Shops and public offices reopened and crowds returned to streets that had been deserted for days.

Both sides confirmed the halt to hostilities but gave different interpretations of the conditions.

The truce, however, was put to the test when sirens went off in southern Israel shortly after taking effect.

Israeli soldiers killed a Palestinian man on Monday in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said, with the army saying it returned fire after being shot at. "Saleh Mohamed Sabra, 22, was killed by live bullets during an Israeli attack in Nablus," the ministry said, adding that another Palestinian was wounded by gunfire.

The Israeli military said suspects hurled rocks and explosives and fired at its forces in Nablus, a flashpoint city where there have been regular raids and clashes. The soldiers shot at the suspects and "a hit was identified", the military said.

It added that the forces were in Nablus to prepare for the possible demolition of the home of a Palestinian suspected of killing two brothers from a Jewish settlement on Feb 26.

Meanwhile, for the first time, the United Nations will officially commemorate the flight of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from what is now Israel on the 75th anniversary of their exodus — an action stemming from the UN's partition of British-ruled Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, The Associated Press reported.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is headlining Monday's UN commemoration of what Palestinians call the Nakba or "catastrophe".

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian UN ambassador, called the UN observance "historic" and significant because the General Assembly played a key role in the partition of Palestine.

"It's acknowledging the responsibility of the UN of not being able to resolve this catastrophe for the Palestinian people for 75 years," Mansour told a group of UN reporters recently.

He said the catastrophe for "the Palestinian people is still ongoing". The Palestinians still don't have an independent state, and they don't have the right to return to their homes as called for in a General Assembly resolution adopted in 1948.

On Sunday, the Iranian Foreign Ministry stressed a diplomatic solution to Palestine's "old crisis". The ministry underlined the issues in a statement to mark the occasion of Nakba Day.

The statement highlighted the necessity to adopt a "diplomatic solution" to enable the displaced Palestinian people to return to their homeland and hold a referendum to decide about its political system.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Tourism boosts South Africa's recovery

By NDUMISO MLILO
in Johannesburg, South Africa
For China Daily

Tourism in South Africa has rebounded quickly this year, though still below pre-COVID-19 levels, according to a senior tourism official, who expects a growing number of visitors, including from China, to boost the country's recovery.

Some 2.1 million travelers visited South Africa in the first quarter of 2023, up by 103 percent compared with the same period last year and almost 80 percent of the 2019 figure, according to the Department of Tourism. Foreign direct spending increased by almost 150 percent to $1.4 billion.

Fish Mahlalela, deputy minister of tourism, predicts the rebound will continue and said that Western Cape, Mpumalanga and Gauteng provinces have already reached pre-COVID-19 levels in tourism.

The country is focusing its efforts on key source markets including the United Kingdom, the United States, India and China, he said, adding that group tours from China this year will assist in the recovery in South Africa and Africa.

"China is the biggest market. We have good relations with the Chinese people and government," Mahlalela said. "As BRICS members, we have an agreement to encourage our citizens to visit each other's countries. BRICS countries constitute the biggest population in the world."

He said that South Africa's recovery plan for the tourism sector has shown signs of success.

E-visa service

To attract international visitors, the country is offering an e-visa service to citizens from 14 nations, including Algeria, Cameroon, Croatia, Cuba, China, Kenya and Nigeria, and authorities are planning to add 20 more countries.

After introducing the e-visa, visitors from Kenya significantly increased in the first three months compared with last year and other countries, said Mahlalela. Other factors such as improving security at tourist destinations also have helped increase visitor numbers.

Abel Yifru, area manager in South Africa for Ethiopian Airways, said the airline is also recovering after the pandemic. The airline, which has reopened existing routes and is opening new international routes, has flights from Ethiopia to five Chinese cities, including Guangzhou, Beijing and Shanghai.

"China has always been the biggest market for us," he said. "We're creating business opportunities for Chinese and Africans and bringing many Chinese tourists to different African countries."

Elise Hashikutuva, deputy director of tourism and development in Namibia, said her country is receiving tourists from China but fewer than the expected numbers. It is working on a memorandum of understanding with China that will involve cooperation in airlines, national tourism boards and other areas.

"We're pushing so that we can reach pre-COVID-19 levels, and we're doing well on that," she said. "We have strong ties with China, and once the MoU is concluded we expect more cooperation. We want to strengthen relations and make sure the Chinese come and enjoy the Namibian hospitality."

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Discovery of remains stirs Native community

BOSTON — As a citizen of the Quapaw Nation, Ahnili Johnson-Jennings has always seen Dartmouth College as the university for Native American students.

Her father graduated from the school, founded in 1769 to educate Native Americans, and she had come to rely on its network of students, professors and administrators. But news in March that the Ivy League school in New Hampshire found partial skeletal remains of 15 Native Americans in one of its collections has Johnson-Jennings and others reassessing that relationship.

"It's hard to reconcile. It's hard to see the college in this old way where they were taking Native remains and using them for their own benefit," said Johnson-Jennings, a senior and co-president of Native Americans at Dartmouth. The remains were used to teach a class as recently as last year, just before an audit concluded they had been wrongly cataloged as not Native.

"It was very upsetting to hear, especially when you've just felt so supported by a school and they've had that secret that maybe no one knew about, but still, to some sense, was a secret," Johnson-Jennings said, describing a March meeting where Native American students were briefed on the discovery.

Dartmouth is among a growing list of universities, museums and other institutions wrestling with how best to handle Native American remains and artifacts in their collections and grappling with what these discoveries say about their past policies regarding Native communities.

For Native tribes, the loss of the remains and cultural items caused significant pain. The remains, most believe, are imbued with the spirit of the ancestor to whom they belong and are connected to living citizens of those tribes.

They could go to court or negotiate with an institution for them to be repatriated. But it wasn't until the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, or NAGPRA, in 1990 that a process was created for their return.

'Moving too slowly'

Critics complain that many institutions move too slowly in repatriating remains and funerary items once they're discovered in their collections, often hiding behind a loophole in NAGPRA that allows them to label remains as culturally unidentifiable. That puts the burden on tribes to prove the remains are their ancestors, an expense many can't afford.

Some 884,000 Native American artifacts — including nearly 102,000 human remains — that should be returned to tribes under federal law are still in the possession of colleges, museums and other institutions across the country, according to data maintained by the National Park Service.

The University of California, Berkeley tops the list, according to the Park Service.

Shannon O'Loughlin, chief executive of the Association on American Indian Affairs, called the practice racist. "It just says that they value the idea of Native Americans as specimens more than they do as human beings," said O'Loughlin, a citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Humanitarian crisis worsens as Sudan conflict prolongs

KHARTOUM — A United Nations report has warned that the humanitarian crisis in Sudan will continue to worsen as hopes are dim for an end to the brutal conflict, now in its second month.

At least 676 people have been killed in clashes between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces, or RSF, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA.

The agency reported that more than 936,000 people have been displaced by the conflict since April 15, including about 736,200 internally displaced. About 200,000 have taken refuge in neighboring Egypt, Ethiopia, Chad and South Sudan.

Sudan's health ministry said the bulk of the deaths had occurred in Darfur. It reported 199 fatalities in the nation's capital, Khartoum, while at least 450 people were killed as of May 10 in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur state, and surrounding areas.

Across Khartoum, those still alive remain barricaded, hoping to dodge stray bullets and enduring desperate shortages of food and basic supplies. There are power blackouts, a lack of cash, communications outages, and runaway inflation.

The UN said it is estimated that about 15.8 million Sudanese, about one-third of the population, will need humanitarian aid this year, and the figure is likely to increase because of the conflict.

Since clashes broke out, aid agencies have been looted and at least 18 humanitarian workers were killed.

Sudan has been witnessing deadly armed clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in Khartoum and other areas since April 15, with the two sides accusing each other of initiating the conflict.

Despite all the bullets, aerial bombardments and anti-aircraft fire since then, neither side has been able to seize the battlefield advantage.

On May 11, the two parties met in the Saudi port city of Jeddah and signed the Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan, to facilitate the delivery of emergency humanitarian aid and guarantee the safe evacuation of civilians. However, the two sides have accused each other of breaching the deal and continuing the clashes.

On Sunday, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the Sudanese army, issued a decision to freeze the bank accounts of RSF and its affiliated companies, his office said in a statement.

In the absence of "a significant change of mindset from the warring parties, it is hard to see that commitments on paper will be fulfilled", said Aly Verjee, a researcher on Sudan studies at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Verjee said the fighting across the country has destroyed workshops and factories and caused "the partial deindustrialization of Sudan".

People wait by the buses upon arrival at the Wadi Karkar village, Egypt, on Sunday after fleeing Sudan. KHALED DESOUKI / AFP

Aid group Doctors Without Borders said food shortages in Darfur displacement camps mean that people have gone from three meals a day to just one.

"This means that any future Sudan will be much poorer for much longer," said Verjee.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

WORLD

Bid to malign China ahead of G7 summit

Rhetoric rises ahead of meeting amid US moves to impose 'tech hegemony'

By **CHINA DAILY**

Recent disputes between the West and China over technology seem to be a matter of who cast the first stone.

The West has placed China under heavy technology restrictions, most notably by the CHIPS Act passed by the US Congress in August.

Earlier there was the Huawei saga and the December 2018 arrest of its chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou, in Canada. US allies in Europe were pressed not to do business with the company.

Visits by US lawmakers to Taiwan last summer also fueled tensions. Nancy Pelosi, then House speaker, visited the island a week before the CHIPS Act was passed.

The act provided roughly $280 billion in new funding to boost domestic research and manufacturing of semiconductors, with the objective to counter China.

Taiwan produces more than 60 percent of the world's semiconductors, according to The Economist. Most of the chips are made by a single company, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company. Many US tech companies are customers of the company.

Ahead of the upcoming G7 meeting in Japan, which starts on Friday, anti-China rhetoric has been rising on economic issues.

An article in The Wall Street Journal on Sunday carried the headline, "G-7 Leaders Expected to Take Aim at Chinese 'Economic Coercion'".

"Did you doubt that #G7 exists to push US foreign policy? Bloomberg reports the (Joe) Biden administration plans to get G7 to copy US limits on foreign investment in China's high-tech industries (AI, chips, etc) at G7 on 19 May in Tokyo," author Tony Norfield tweeted on April 21.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters at a briefing in Beijing last week that when it comes to international rules, the US "is in no position to point fingers at other countries".

Uncertain outcome

The outcome of efforts by the US to align allies against China remains uncertain.

"The US and Japan are fairly united," said Thomas Cynkin of the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, The Wall Street Journal reported. "But the Europeans have been very reluctant."

In March, China announced a review of Micron, a semiconductor company based in Idaho, after the US enacted export bans on advanced semiconductors and production equipment in October.

Colin Hawes, an associate law professor at the University of Technology in Sydney, was quoted by MarketWatch as saying, "The constant recent US political attacks and draconian sanctions on China will definitely impact the way that these cases play out."

James Zimmermann, a longtime China-based businessman and former chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in China, told MarketWatch: "Someone is bound to get hurt in this tetchy environment."

In October, the White House published a set of export controls including a measure to cut China off from certain semiconductor chips made anywhere in the world with US equipment, vastly expanding its efforts to hamper Beijing's technological advances.

The rules followed restrictions sent in letters last year to US toolmakers KLA, Lam Research and Applied Materials, effectively requiring them to halt shipments of equipment to wholly Chinese-owned factories producing advanced logic chips.

Senior US government officials said in October that many of the measures were aimed at preventing foreign firms from selling advanced chips to China or supplying Chinese firms with tools to make their own advanced chips. They conceded, however, that they had not secured any promises from allied nations that they would enact similar measures.

The new regulations severely restricted exports of US equipment to Chinese memory chipmakers and restricted shipments to China of chips used in supercomputing systems.

At the time, China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning called the move an abuse of trade measures designed to reinforce the US' "technological hegemony".

Agencies contributed to this story.

Japanese people rally at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in protest against the G7 summit. YANG GUANG / XINHUA

Cyclone impact

Residents walk past fallen trees in Kyauktaw, Myanmar, on Monday after Cyclone Mocha crashed ashore. Three people have died after the cyclone tore through the west of the country and neighboring Bangladesh. SAI AUNG MAIN / AFP

2023 seen as historic for Sino-Tajik ties

DUSHANBE — 2023 will be historic for the Tajikistan-China relationship, Guzel Maitdinova, director of the Center for Geopolitical Studies at the Russian-Tajik (Slavonic) University, told Xinhua in an interview ahead of the China-Central Asia Summit.

This year is important as it not only marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of a strategic partnership between the two countries but also the 10th anniversary of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, said Maitdinova.

She believes relations between both countries have flourished, and the partnership has bright prospects ahead.

The China-Central Asia Summit will take place in Xi'an, capital of North China's Shaanxi province, and Maitdinova believes it will be a significant event that will contribute to the development and modernization of Central Asian states.

Maitdinova noted that the summit will also promote the coupling of the BRI with the national development strategies of Central Asian countries.

She pointed out that security issues will also be critical at the upcoming summit, especially the Afghanistan issue, which would offer great contributions to regional peace and stability and have great significance for the overall development of Central Asian countries.

Mutual respect

When discussing the Tajikistan-China relationship, Maitdinova said the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership has been established on the basis of mutual respect for sovereignty, security and territorial integrity.

The two sides are committed to deeply integrating the BRI with Tajikistan's National Development Strategy, with a further aim to strengthen political, economic and trade, military and technological cooperation, as well as cooperation in other fields.

Maitdinova said the Tajikistan-China relationship is reaching a new level of strategic coordination, continuing to give impetus to cooperation in various fields such as politics, economy and culture.

She believes that the practical cooperation between Tajikistan and China has yielded remarkable results in recent years. A vast number of successful projects launched with China's support have had a positive impact on the Tajik people's livelihoods.

"Important projects have been implemented over the years that have contributed to Tajikistan's economic development," Maitdinova noted.

"About 50 joint investment projects are being implemented in Tajikistan," she said.

At the same time, increased people-to-people and cultural exchanges between the two countries have also bolstered the bonds between the two peoples.

The scholar has high expectations for the future of the Tajikistan-China relationship.

"Within the framework of docking Tajikistan's national development strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative, the two countries have great potential in jointly developing the Green Silk Road," she said.

XINHUA

Briefly

IRAN

Teheran, Cairo to restore relations soon

An Iranian lawmaker said negotiations between Iran and Egypt are going on in Iraq and the two countries' relations will be restored in the near future. Fada Hossein Maleki, a member of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, made the remarks in an interview with the Tasnim news agency, which was published on Sunday. The Iranian and Egyptian embassies in the two countries will be reopened in the next step, and a meeting will be arranged between Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi after that, he added.

ARGENTINA

Govt plans new rate hike as inflation soars

Argentina's government announced a package of measures to rein in soaring inflation and support the wobbly peso currency on Sunday, including rate adjustments, more interventions in the exchange market and expedited deals with creditors. The measures include an interest rate hike by the central bank, the economy ministry said in a statement. The ministry did not elaborate, but an official source told Reuters the hike would be 600 basis points, bringing the rate up to 97 percent. The rate hike was expected to take effect on Monday, the source added. The South American nation is battling to bring down inflation that hit 109 percent on an annual basis in April.

SLOVAKIA

Economist picked as caretaker prime minister

Economist Ludovit Odor was made Slovakia's interim prime minister on Monday and he will lead the country until early elections are held in September, after months of political infighting brought down the previous center-right government. Slovakia, a member of the European Union, has struggled with high inflation driven largely by the conflict in neighboring Ukraine, and political turmoil after the previous prime minister's cabinet lost a no-confidence vote in December. Odor, 46, is an economist who comes to the job straight from the board of the country's central bank.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Zelensky in UK on European tour seeking military aid

LONDON — Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky met on Monday with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who pledged both air-defense missiles and long-range attack drones to Kyiv.

The United Kingdom is the fourth European country Zelensky has visited in the past few days. He made an unannounced visit to Paris on Sunday evening to meet with French President Emmanuel Macron, after trips to Germany and Italy. It's Zelensky's second trip to the UK since the conflict started in February 2022.

The UK has become one of Ukraine's major military allies, sending Kyiv short-range missiles and Challenger tanks and training 15,000 Ukrainian troops on British soil.

Last week, the UK announced it had sent Ukraine Storm Shadow cruise missiles, which have a range of more than 250 kilometers.

Sunak's office said that on Monday Britain was expected to confirm it is giving Ukraine hundreds more air defense missiles, as well as "long-range attack drones" with a range of more than 200 kilometers.

Move denounced

The Kremlin said it took London's promise to supply Ukraine with more weapons "extremely negatively," but at the same time believed the supplies wouldn't drastically change the course of the conflict, spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.

"Britain aspires to be at the forefront among countries that continue to pump weapons into Ukraine," Peskov said.

"We repeat once again, it cannot yield any drastic and fundamental influence on the way the special military operation (in Ukraine) is unfolding. But, definitely, it leads to further destruction, further action. ... It makes this whole story for Ukraine much more complicated."

Zelensky and Macron met for about three hours at the French presidential Elysee Palace — an encounter kept under wraps until shortly before the Ukrainian leader's arrival in Paris.

France had dispatched a plane to pick up Zelensky in Germany, where he met with Chancellor Olaf Scholz earlier on Sunday. On Saturday, he met Pope Francis and Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni in Rome.

In Moscow, Russia's parliament was expected to decide on Monday when to formally denounce the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, or CFE, following President Vladimir Putin's decree on May 10.

The European armed forces treaty, from which Moscow is to withdraw, is contrary to Russia's security interests, Russia's envoy in charge of the withdrawal said in remarks published early on Monday.

"Any illusions of those who still hoped that Russia will return to the treaty, they will disappear," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said.

On the battlefield, Russia's Defense Ministry said on Sunday that two of its military commanders were killed in eastern Ukraine, as Kyiv's forces renewed efforts to break through Russian defenses in the embattled city of Bakhmut.

In a daily briefing, the ministry said that Commander Vyacheslav Makarov of the Fourth Motorized Rifle Brigade and Deputy Commander Yevgeny Brvoko from a separate unit were killed trying to repel Ukrainian attacks.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Cease-fire the priority as Colombia peace talks resume

By **SERGIO HELD** in Bogota
For China Daily

The Colombian government has entered a third round of peace talks with the National Liberal Army, or ELN, in Havana, Cuba, as it looks to end the violence that has raged in the country since 1964.

The latest round of negotiations began on May 2 and will run through May 29.

"The priority ... will be to advance in humanitarian actions and dynamics and in the structuring of a bilateral cease-fire that will mitigate the impacts of armed confrontation in territories that today suffer the ravages of war," the government's peace delegation said in a statement.

However, given the complexity of the conflict and its multiple actors, negotiators face a challenge to secure a cease-fire, analysts say.

"For a cease-fire to be effective, the ELN will need to be able to guarantee the unity of command over all fronts, which, given its structure and composition, would be a horizontal process that takes a long time. If an agreement is reached and the agreement is violated, it could put the whole process at risk," said Gabriel Cifuentes, a Colombian lawyer and political analyst.

While discussions take place in Cuba, on the ground in Colombia, the ELN and state security forces are mostly avoiding conflict.

D'Mar Cordoba, a lawyer and political analyst in Bogota, the capital, said an order given by Colombian President Gustavo Petro to troops to halt offensives against the group means "the cease-fire is practically a reality".

He underscored that what the South American country is witnessing is the establishment of a dual power, allowing the guerrillas to control territories with the permission of the state and in the framework of the so-called total peace plan drawn up by Petro, a former M-19 guerrilla fighter, and his government.

"This new round of talks surely points to a new failure, as the previous two rounds were, in spite of the fact that the president has tried to sell (the idea) as the great solution to reach an agreement," Angela Velez, European spokeswoman for the National Salvation Movement, a Colombian right-wing political party, said from Madrid, Spain.

Guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC, signed a peace deal with the Colombian government in 2016 and obtained seats in Congress.

Some 7,000 members of the group were demobilized, and its highest leaders are being tried in a special peace court, which has so far not ruled a single conviction.

Cifuentes said a cease-fire has "great difficulties, not only for its implementation but also for the development of an agenda within the framework of a country in which not only the ELN is an armed actor".

Representatives of the Colombian government and the National Liberal Army gather for a group photo at the inauguration of the third cycle of negotiations in Havana, Cuba, on May 2. RAMON ESPINOSA / AP

"There are more than 50 organizations underway," he added, "so it's a very complex scenario full of variables that will surely have to be considered."

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Trade relations between China, Australia shine

More cooperation, biz opportunities seen ahead as win-win mood spreads

By ZHONG NAN
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China and Australia enhanced their economic and trade relations last week, and this will offer institutional support for business cooperation, besides creating more commercial opportunities for both sides, experts and company leaders said on Monday.

They were reacting to the renewed dialogue between Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and Australian Trade Minister Don Farrell, which marked the 16th China-Australia Joint Ministerial Economic Commission in Beijing on Friday, held under the aegis of China's Ministry of Commerce.

During the meeting, Wang called on Australia to make efforts with China to expand common interests and address each other's concerns on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.

In a separate statement released on Saturday, Farrell said the two sides agreed to step up dialogue under their existing free trade agreement and other platforms, in order to stabilize the bilateral trade relationship.

The two ministers discussed opportunities for further cooperation, including topics on climate change, digital trade and e-commerce, and the reform of the World Trade Organization.

This was the first in-person meeting between the trade and commerce ministers of the two countries since 2019. The last China-Australia Joint Ministerial Economic Commission was held in Beijing in 2017.

The renewed engagement between the two countries signifies an improvement in bilateral business ties, said Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

The high-level dialogues to follow would offer institutional guarantees, foster confidence among businesses and build stable expectations, said Zhou.

China-Australia trade dropped by almost 4 percent year-on-year to $220.92 billion in 2022, data from China's General Administration of Customs showed.

However, their total trade value surged nearly 11 percent year-on-year to $58.79 billion in the first quarter of this year.

The growth in foreign trade figures during this period indicates that China-Australia trade and economic relations have entered a phase of substantial improvement, with exports of wheat, cotton, iron ore and coal from Australia to China set to rise, said Chen Hong, director of the Australian Studies Center at East China Normal University in Shanghai.

"It also appears that progress has been made in efforts to resolve the China-Australia dispute over trade in barley, wine and lobsters," said Chen. "The previous Australian government tied its foreign policy excessively to the United States, undermining the China-Australia economic and trade relationship, which ultimately hurt the Australian economy."

Therefore, a long-term and effective friendly relationship with China is conducive to the development of bilateral business ties, he said.

Since global headwinds have affected the Australian economy and labor market because of its small population size and scattered manufacturing sector, China could be the best partner for Australia to help it deal with its current challenges, said Zhang Yongjun, deputy chief economist at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges in Beijing.

Jakob Stausholm, CEO of Rio Tinto, the Australian iron ore miner, said he has an optimistic short-term outlook for iron ore. There is a direct correlation between China's accelerating growth and the demand for iron ore, he said.

"Based on the current robust cooperation with China, Rio Tinto is confident in the new GDP growth target (of "around 5 percent" for 2023) China has set and we believe China is expected to make a significant contribution to global economic growth this year once again," he said.

Bellamy's Organic, an Australian organic infant milk powder and complementary baby food products provider, said it will seek to increase its sales in China by following current trends. The company will also strive to narrow the gap between itself and the new generation of young mothers through new media marketing, joint intellectual property activities and private domain marketing this year.

Daisy Liu, Bellamy's Organic's marketing general manager in China, said, "We will invest more resources in the market for mid-range and high-end formula milk powder, snacks and supplementary food, to further diversify our offerings."

Employees work on the production line of tractors, which are bound for export to Australia, in Luoyang, Henan province. ZHANG YIXI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Nation assures RCEP full implementation on Philippine move

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the largest global free trade agreement, will soon enter into effect across the board as its last member economy submitted its ratification, which experts said will help navigate uncertainties and boost global trade.

The Philippines, as the last member country to deposit its instrument of ratification recently, will see the agreement enter into force on June 2, according to a news release published by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Secretariat.

To facilitate the full implementation of the RCEP, China will earnestly honor the commitments laid out in the agreement, according to a notice circulated Monday by the Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council.

Starting June 2, China will levy the conventional tariff rates pledged under the RCEP for ASEAN member countries on some goods originating from the Philippines, the notice said, adding that the future conventional tariff rates will be implemented on an annual basis from Jan 1.

The RCEP was signed by 15 Asia-Pacific countries on Nov 15, 2020 and its signatories include the 10 ASEAN members, China, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

With the RCEP scheduled to be in force in the Philippines, all 15 member states are set to complete their due procedures for implementation and exercise tariff concessions, which will soon bring in the agreement's complete implementation.

According to World Bank data, the agreement covers 2.3 billion people or 30 percent of the world's population, contributes $25.8 trillion or about 30 percent of global GDP, and accounts for $12.7 trillion, or over a quarter of global trade in goods and services.

Zhang Jianping, head of the center for regional economic cooperation at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said the agreement will deliver such benefits as lower trade barriers, improved market access, more streamlined Customs-related procedures, and tariff concessions from trading partners.

The RCEP is of great significance for participating countries to jointly tackle the uncertainties in the international landscape, increase intra-regional trade and investment, stabilize industrial and supply chains and enhance people's well-being, Zhang said.

WANG KEJU

Briefly

CNOOC energy platform sets record

China National Offshore Oil Corp said it set a new national record on Saturday with the installation of its offshore oil and gas platform in the eastern waters of the South China Sea. The platform weighs more than 15,000 metric tons, a record for China's offshore oil and gas platforms, in terms of dynamic positioning float-over installations. CNOOC said it has also filled a gap in domestic technology while further ensuring domestic energy security. The Enping 20-4 platform has been successfully docked with a submarine jacket in the Pearl River Mouth Basin in South China's Guangdong province on Saturday. The docking was completed independently by Chinese companies for the first time, including design, calculation and construction, CNOOC said.

Number of ride-hailing firms reaches 309

The count of China's online ride-hailing companies reached 309 by the end of April, two more than the number registered in the previous month, data from the Ministry of Transport showed. By the end of last month, the authorized ride-hailing vehicle certificates and driver licenses in the country hit 2.3 million and 5.4 million, up 2.2 percent and 3.4 percent month-on-month, respectively, according to the ministry. In April, 706 million ride-hailing trips were made. Hangzhou, the capital city of East China's Zhejiang province, led the city list in terms of compliance rate of online-hailing orders, according to the data.

Rubber tire and auto accessory show starts

The 13th China (Guangrao) International Rubber Tire and Auto Accessory Exhibition kicked off in Guangrao county, Shandong province, on Monday and will close on Wednesday. Covering an area of 48,000 square meters, the exhibition attracted more than 750 exhibitors, among whom 50 are Fortune 500 companies. Over 800 companies are taking part in the exhibition online, 15 percent higher than that of the last exhibition. Seven high-level forums will cover the topics of new materials, trade policy, talent cultivation and industrial innovation.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Key banks' deposit rate cuts expected to bolster real economy

By ZHANG YUE
zhangyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Recent cuts to time deposit interest rates by a number of commercial banks in China are expected to boost banks' lending capacity and spur growth of the real economy, experts said.

Over the past month, several key commercial banks had nudged their deposit rate lower. Earlier this month, several mid-sized commercial banks, including China Zheshang Bank Co, Hengfeng Bank Co and China Bohai Bank Co, lowered their deposit rates on some tenors by 10 to 30 basis points.

After the adjustment, China Zheshang Bank Co will pay 2.9 percent on three-year deposits and 2.95 percent on five-year deposits, down from 3 percent and 3.25 percent, respectively.

On Monday, the People's Bank of China, China's central bank, rolled over maturing medium-term lending facility or MLF while keeping the interest rate unchanged at 2.75 percent.

In a statement late on Monday, the PBOC said China's economy is not experiencing a deflation.

Price rises are still moderate, with the core consumer price index rising 0.7 percent year-on-year (in both March and April), and broad money supply and social financing relatively fast-growing. The economy is ever improving and does not fit the definition of deflation, the PBOC statement in Chinese said, adding the economy does not exhibit conditions that indicate long-term inflation or deflation.

Experts believe the current situation does not warrant a policy rate cut.

Meanwhile, with deposit rates coming down at several key banks, their profit margins will increase and profitability pressure on banks will ease.

Zhou Maohua, an analyst at China Everbright Bank, said deposit rate cuts appear to show banks' urge to maintain their profitability, as they had been facing squeezed profit margins in recent years.

"On the one hand, with China constantly deepening its market-oriented interest rate reform, banks now have more mandates to manage their costs. On the other hand, with household savings up sharply and many savings turning into time deposits, banks' cost of liabilities has increased," Zhou said.

Households' increased willingness in the past three years to save money due to the COVID-19 situation has led to a sharp increase in deposits.

Household savings surged by 9.9 trillion yuan ($1.42 trillion) in the first quarter, after a record growth to 17.8 trillion yuan in 2022, according to PBOC data. Net interest margins, a key measure of banks' profitability, hit a record low of just 1.91 percent at the end of 2022, the first time since 2010 that figure dropped under the 2 percent line, according to data released by the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission in April.

In April, some smaller banks in China cut their time deposit interest rates, following a similar move by the country's larger banks last year.

Gao Ruidong, chief macroeconomist at Everbright Securities, said that while banks are adjusting their deposit rates to battle shrinking margins, such cuts will help channel more cash from the savings pool into the real economy.

"With an overall downtrend in deposits, net margin pressures in the financial system will ease, creating more space for banks to facilitate the real economy.

"Easing net interest margin also generates greater possibilities for lower lending rates. We expect further cuts to lending rates if there is more fresh momentum in the ongoing economic recovery," Gao said.

Pedestrians walk past the headquarters of the People's Bank of China in Beijing. LIU JIANHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hong Kong LNG project to optimize Bay area energy structure

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

The Hong Kong liquefied natural gas or LNG project, whose trial operations started on Sunday, is expected to significantly optimize the energy structure of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area while ensuring domestic energy security, industry experts said on Monday.

The LNG project, which includes a dual-berth offshore LNG receiving terminal, an onshore LNG receiving terminal and two submarine pipelines, is the largest offshore energy infrastructure construction project in recent years in Hong Kong, according to its operator China Offshore Oil Engineering Co Ltd or COOEC.

The core of the LNG project, the receiving terminal is the world's first offshore all-steel double-berth structure, said COOEC, a listed company controlled by China National Offshore Oil Corp or CNOOC.

It is capable of accommodating two of the world's largest FSRUs — floating storage and regasification units — or LNG transport ships for berthing and operation at the same time, COOEC said.

26.69 million tons
volume of LNG imports by China National Offshore Oil Corp in 2022

According to Liu Zhigang, deputy director of the COOEC Hong Kong Offshore LNG Terminal EPC project, the designed service life of the terminal is 50 years, more than twice that of conventional offshore LNG receiving terminals.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said CNOOC has, in recent years, formed a complete LNG engineering construction capability, ranging from liquefaction to regasification onshore and offshore. Its assets and capabilities now rank among the world's top modular, super large LNG storage tanks and LNG receiving terminal construction expertise.

"The company has been strengthening the key core technology research and development of clean energy engineering over the years, which has in turn promoted China's energy structure transformation and the realization of the dual-carbon goals," Lin said.

The operation of the Hong Kong LNG project will provide stable and clean power generation fuel to Hong Kong via submarine pipelines and substantially increase the proportion of clean energy generation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, he said.

Oil and gas production of CNOOC reached a record high of 120 million metric tons of oil equivalent last year, with domestic crude oil and natural gas production up by 3.39 million tons and 2.7 billion cubic meters year-on-year, respectively. The increase in crude oil production accounted for over 60 percent of the country's total increase, it said.

CNOOC imported 26.69 million tons of LNG last year. Overseas oil and gas production rose to 46.24 million tons of oil equivalent so far in 2023 as the company continuously strengthens international energy cooperation while optimizing asset layout in countries and regions participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, it said.

BUSINESS

Visitors check out the recording scene of a UHD video during the World UHD Video Industrial Conference 2023 in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, last week. SHI LEI / NANFANG DAILY

UHD to boost development of videos, see wider applications

MIIT official vows intensified efforts in sector, urges bigger role for leading firms

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

China will ratchet up efforts to develop ultra-high-definition videos and mull a series of new policies to promote the high-quality development of the video industry, with a focus on enriching application scenarios of UHD videos and bolstering the integration with a wide range of industries, officials and experts said.

The total scale of China's UHD video industry exceeded 3 trillion yuan ($431.6 billion) by the end of last year, according to a white paper released by the Beijing-based China Center for Information Industry Development during the World UHD Video Industrial Conference 2023, which was held last week in Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

Currently, eight 4K UHD TV channels and two 8K TV channels have been launched across the nation. UHD is a term that includes two video resolutions — 4K and 8K — with 8K resolution an image or display with a width of about 8,000 pixels, currently the highest UHD resolution in digital television and digital cinematography.

China has made significant progress in developing UHD video technology in recent years, with breakthroughs and industrial applications achieved in 8K UHD cameras, 8K monitors, 8K imaging sensors and optical lenses, the white paper said.

It added that the in-depth integration of UHD video with 5G, artificial intelligence, virtual reality and other new-generation information technologies has spawned a large number of new scenarios, new applications and new models, becoming an important driving force for bolstering the digital transformation of various industries.

China will step up policy support and roll out new measures to boost the development of the video industry, said Zhao Zhiguo, chief engineer of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Heightened efforts should be made to give full play to the role of leading enterprises to establish a UHD industrial ecosystem and build up differentiated video industry clusters with distinctive features across the nation, Zhao noted.

He also called for more push to accelerate the upgrade of industrial chains, promote the digitalization of broadcasting, television and video production, deepen the integration and application of video technology in key fields, as well as expand international exchanges and cooperation.

The ministry has issued a slew of policies to support the UHD industry, and sped up the construction of gigabit networks, digital centers and other new infrastructure.

Zhao added that China has taken a global lead in producing 5G-powered 8K video content and UHD videos have accelerated integration with 5G and AI technologies, with broad applications in sectors like manufacturing, culture, education, entertainment, healthcare and intelligent transportation.

China is at the global forefront of the semiconductor display sector, which is a key link of the global UHD industry, accounting for more than 70 percent of global large-sized liquid crystal display output, ranking first around the world, said Wang Cheng, chief operating officer of Chinese home appliance giant TCL Technology Group, adding that the country has become the world's largest panel manufacturing base.

"At present, China's economy is gradually recovering and consumption is picking up rapidly. The UHD industry will usher in a new stage of development, buoyed by the speedy growth of vehicle-mounted displays, foldable smartphones, the metaverse, smart healthcare and smart retail," Wang said.

Wang called for establishing UHD industry alliances to safeguard the stability of the semiconductor display industrial chain and making breakthroughs in key technologies, materials and equipment.

Takeshi Yoshida, president of Sony (China) Ltd, said: "As we enter a new era of digital networks, AI and UHD, Sony hopes to continue assisting China's UHD video industry to flourish through its own technology, products and industry experience."

Yoshida said the company has formed complete solutions in the fields of professional, high-quality shooting and editing, low-latency transmission, high-end large-screen displays, and mobile and home audio-visual entertainment.

"In the strategically significant Chinese market, Sony is committed to working closely with all partners to continually introduce innovative and high value-added technologies, products and solutions that meet the expectations of the Chinese market and industry," he added.

Dong Min, deputy secretary-general of the China Video Industry Association, said the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and the deployment of superfast 5G technology has made the transmission of 8K content possible and bolstered the sales of 8K TVs and 8K-related content production.

5G wireless telecommunication technology can solve content transmission, compression and decoding problems for 8K UHD displays and provide solutions for various fields covering entertainment, medical imaging, broadcasting, security monitoring and remote education, said Ai Weiqi, research manager of consumer electronics at Beijing-based market consultancy All View Cloud.

Southeastern Shanghai 'mud town' evolves into home of Tesla Gigafactory

SHANGHAI — Four years is usually just a brief moment in time, but Nicheng, once a little-known township in southeastern Shanghai, was propelled as if under the control of a fast-forward button, undergoing a tremendous and speedy transformation unseen in its history.

Nicheng — meaning "mud town" in English — takes its name from its geographic location. Adjacent to Hangzhou Bay, the town was formed by the accumulation of sediment carried by the Yangtze and Qiantang rivers.

About 200 years ago, local residents reclaimed the tidal flat, from which it got its name.

For decades, Nicheng was a neglected area with a poor transportation network and sluggish economic growth, until Jan 7, 2019, when deafeningly noisy machines used to construct Tesla's Shanghai Gigafactory carved out a new chapter in its development.

"We knew from the beginning that the establishment of this project would bring great opportunities for the development of Nicheng," said Zhang Yinbiao, Party secretary of Nicheng.

In fact, before the Tesla project, a series of preparations had been made in Nicheng, which longed for a chance to take off.

In 2013, Nicheng was listed as one of the four major commercial centers in the southeastern part of Pudong.

Its location along the Shanghai-Luchaogang Expressway has also given it the privilege to develop a manufacturing chain.

The construction of Tesla's Shanghai plant — the first wholly foreign-owned car manufacturing enterprise in China — was completed in less than a year. It is Tesla's first Gigafactory outside the United States. The plant delivered 710,000 vehicles in 2022, a 48 percent increase from 2021, accounting for over half of Tesla's global delivery.

The Shanghai plant has become Tesla's primary vehicle export hub, with electric cars selling well in the Asia-Pacific, Europe and other regions.

"The high efficiency of Tesla's Shanghai Gigafactory was supported by a sound business environment and industrial ecology in Shanghai. It is a demonstration of Shanghai's global competitiveness and ability to better allocate global resources," said Tian Xinmin, vice-dean at Antai College of Economics and Management, Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

Tesla's Shanghai Gigafactory has brought about considerable spillover effects.

According to the company, the localization rate of the industrial chain of the Gigafactory has exceeded 95 percent. Nicheng is among those that have benefited the most.

About 10 kilometers away from Tesla's Shanghai plant, numerous automated guided vehicles are running around at the futuristic workshop of Yanfeng International Seating Systems Co Ltd.

"Here, about 3,500 sets of car seats are rolled off the assembly line every day and delivered to Tesla and SAIC Motor factories not far away," Jia Tingwen, the head of the assembly workshop, told Xinhua as he kept a close eye on the fast-running production line.

The thriving automobile industry cluster in Nicheng has not only accelerated local industrial upgrading, but also become a big driver in improving the public transportation network and other supporting facilities in surrounding areas, providing better living and working conditions for local residents.

"We've set two goals for Nicheng this year, to drive industrial investment and tax revenues to over 10 billion yuan ($1.4 billion) and 3 billion yuan, respectively," Nicheng's Party secretary Zhang said.

XINHUA

An aerial view of Tesla's Gigafactory in Shanghai. The factory produced 710,000 electric vehicles last year. JIN LIWANG / XINHUA

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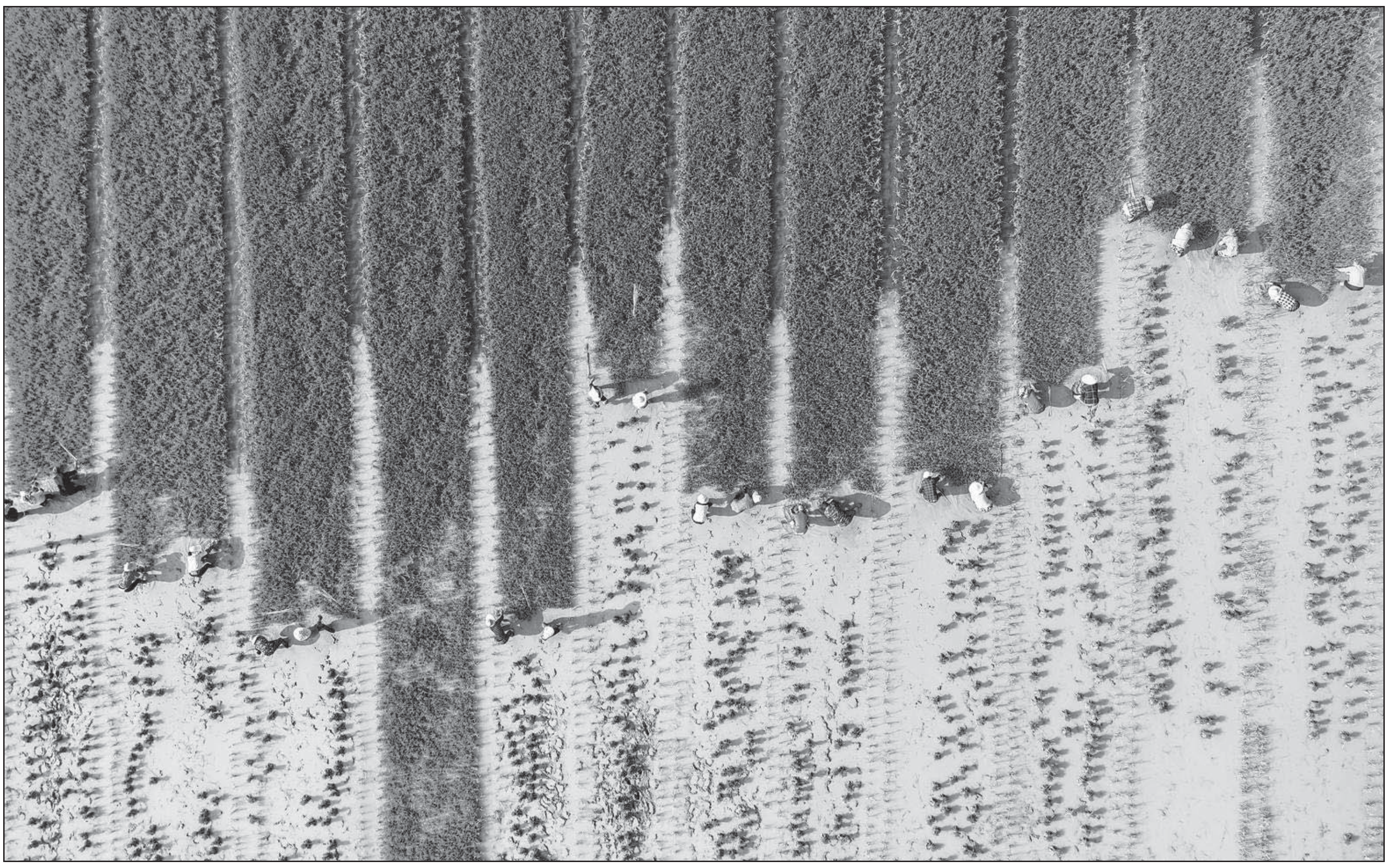

Fiscal funds generate new economic momentum for rural vitalization

Acceleration of special local government bonds keeps economy stable and sound in past three years

By ZHANG YUE
zhangyue@chinadaily.com.cn

With businesses in China widely and actively rebounding since January, China's growth is speeding up from the pandemic impact felt since early 2020. Economic activity is once again up and running and the country's fiscal revenue increased in March on the back of recovering economic vigor.

Figures from the Ministry of Finance in late April show that fiscal revenue grew 5.5 percent in March after declining 1.2 percent in January-February, a strong sign of recovery after three challenging years.

Critical factors

A number of critical factors have served in this process. Among them, central fiscal funds have not only helped several localities survive the hard times, but also set up new projects that benefit local livelihoods. Figures from the Ministry of Finance showed that special bond issuance for the first three months of this year has come in at 1.36 trillion yuan ($195.6 billion), up 4.53 percent from the same period last year.

Experts said that during the past three years, China's economy maintained a stable and sound performance thanks to the consistent fiscal fund offerings, especially special-purpose bonds. This can be partly seen from the rapid growth of infrastructure investment.

Each year between 2018 and 2022, part of the quota of special local government bonds was issued and allocated several months in advance to energize investment and facilitate local infrastructure construction. The projects they've supported and sustained have helped localities perform notably despite hits from the pandemic. For instance, some 1.46 trillion yuan in the 2022 quota for local government special bonds were issued in December 2021 as an effort to help spur investment and support the economy.

Overall growth stable

Special local government bonds are a form of off-budget debt that local governments use to raise cash for a particular policy and projects approved by central finance, primarily involving infrastructure investments. Such bonds were introduced by the central government in 2015.

Li Xuhong, a professor at the Beijing National Accounting Institute, said that during the past three years, fiscal funds such as special local government bonds served as a key fulcrum of macro-economic maneuvers in countering pandemic hits and keeping overall growth stable.

"First, they've worked effectively to ensure and improve people's livelihoods. Most projects invested in using special local government bonds are government-approved projects with strong public attributes and visibly serve in improving people's lives. For instance, a large number of projects to help with rural vitalization were supported by special local government bonds. In addition, these funds, particularly in recent years, have played an irreplaceable role in catalyzing investments when private investments somehow lost steam, keeping overall investment stable," Li said.

For Liu Xiaojun, deputy head of the Heqing township government in Mianyang, Sichuan province, his greatest relief last year was the completion of more than 30,000 *mu* (2,000 hectares) of high-standard farmland construction accumulated by the end of last year. The improvements made in the process have largely facilitated local farmers' cultivation process.

"Every year when it comes to the rice harvest season, the harvesting is quite a challenging process for local farmers. In the mountainous area, irrigation and mechanized cultivation have been difficult and time-consuming," he said. "With local farms upgraded with high-standard farmland, agricultural mechanization has been greatly improved. The efficiency of farm work, particularly during harvest season, has improved and lifted local people's incomes."

Southwest China's Sichuan province is home to 96.95 million *mu* of arable land as of 2022 and ranks ninth nationwide in terms of grain production. Many of the key projects supported by special local government bonds were agriculture- and rural-related. Since 2018, some 79.2 billion yuan released from special local government bonds have supported 519 key rural development projects in 21 cities in Sichuan.

Further innovations

He Qiang, an official responsible for local bond issuances and debt at the Sichuan Provincial Finance Department, said that there have been innovations in the application of special local government bonds. Such new developments have worked effectively in catalyzing larger amounts of social investment.

"For example, for some water conservation projects, financing innovation modules used funds released from the special local government bonds as capital to catalyze social and private investments for the projects," he said. "Since 2018, a total of 6.8 billion yuan released from special local government bonds have been used as primary capital for projects on rural vitalization and have catalyzed a total of 40 billion yuan in social investments."

Li at the Beijing National Accounting Institute underlined the role that special local government bonds have played in energizing social capital and completing projects that benefit livelihoods, especially when social investment momentum was relatively in the doldrums during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Since 2020, due to the severe disruptions caused by COVID-19, many key projects at local levels that were previously planned outfaced the risk of shutting down because of lack of funding. Accelerating the issuance and allocation of special local government bonds has played a role in the counter-cyclical fiscal policy adjustment and ensured the stable operations of key infrastructure projects, generating real economic activity," she said.

Li explained that in recent years, fiscal revenue and expenditures at local government levels have remained in a tight balance. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a heavier blow to them and hampered their capacity to support key projects that bear on both local livelihoods and the region's stable economic performance.

"In recent years, the constant earlier issuance and allocation of special local bonds have alleviated spending pressures for local governments in a timely manner and successfully ensured the early opening of infrastructure projects every year, generating real economic activity," she said. "In addition, by precisely formulating the areas allowed using the funds of these special local bonds, it has ensured that the funds are put in place where the country's high-quality development drive needs them the most, such as rural vitalization."

Promoting restructuring

The Government Work Report released during this year's two sessions — the top legislative and political advisory meetings — in March has made it clear that the government will work to promote restructuring while reining in an incremental buildup of hidden debt. When attending a news conference in early March, Liu Kun, China's finance minister, said that while the imbalance between fiscal revenue and spending remains acute, there won't be any phase-out in fiscal spending on people's livelihoods.

"As a transparent, compliant fiscal financing tool of good quality, special local government bonds have been an integral vehicle in China's fiscal financing and the role they have played during the past three years is worth recognizing," said Robin Xing, chief China economist with Morgan Stanley.

Top: Villagers sow rice seedlings in Mianyang, Sichuan province, in May 2022.
WANG KAI / FOR CHINA DAILY
Left: A technician operates a machine at a vertical farm in Xinjin district of Chengdu, Sichuan province, in September.
TANG WENHAO / XINHUA

> "... special local government bonds have been an integral vehicle in China's fiscal financing and the role they have played during the past three years is worth recognizing."
>
> **Robin Xing,** chief China economist with Morgan Stanley

Better lives are the essence of China's development

Zhang Yue
Reporter's Log

As a journalist who has grown up and settled in urban areas my entire adult life, interview-based trips have long been the only chance for me to make grounded observations of China's rural life and agricultural development. My earlier life as a journalist has constantly brought me into areas of the least-developed rural areas. Partially because of how strongly rural areas stand distinctly apart from metropolises, I always find my visits to the countryside impressive and intriguing.

The past three years of COVID-19 frequently prevented me from traveling outside of Beijing. Last month, I took my first week-long business trip in three years across three provinces to once again visit the countryside. The pandemic has impacted economic development almost everywhere, and I was concerned that rural areas would be hampered more severely due to relatively more stressed revenues.

In mid-April, I arrived in the countryside of Chengdu, Sichuan province. The province is an important agricultural production base in China and ranks ninth nationwide in grain production. I was introduced to an agriculture exhibition area surrounded by vast cultivated land located more than 50 miles from central Chengdu.

As I was visiting, I was among a group of tourists instead of farmers, who were posing and taking many photos with their smartphones. Kids were having a carnival with plants and food products displayed in a round-shaped indoor exhibition hall. It felt like I was at a scenic spot rather than farmland.

I later learned that springtime is the best season for urban residents in Chengdu to spend their weekends in the area. The Xinjin agriculture garden and exhibition house that I was visiting also has homes and hotel rooms for short- and long-term homestays and rural experiences.

Xie Liusheng, a staff member at the agriculture exhibition resort, said that the entire resort project's completion was supported by funds released from last year's special local government bonds. Construction of the project started in 2019 and its building was later supported by funds released from the special local government bonds in 2020 and 2021.

"Especially during the pandemic, when urban residents in Chengdu looked for an outdoor place of leisure for a weekend or holidays, choices were limited. Now, the resort is less than an hour's drive from downtown Chengdu and children can learn about agriculture from a fun tour," Xie said.

After three years of weekends and holidays spent in China's capital city of Beijing, I could empathize with what he shared with me. Projects that were built in the past three years under public fiscal funds not only serve to meet the essential needs of the people, but more importantly, some have made their lives better and more fun now that COVID-19 is no longer a significant threat. In my opinion, making lives better is the essence of China's high-quality development drive.

Contact the writer at zhangyue@chinadaily.com.cn

People visit the Xinjin agriculture garden and exhibition house in Chengdu, Sichuan province, in September.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Clockwise from top left: Stills from four movies that have been produced to promote Peking Opera — *The Gathering of Heroes: Borrowing the East Wind*, *The You Sisters of the Red Chamber*, *Silang Visits His Mother* and *Cai Wenji Returns to Her Homeland*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Peking Opera classics get modern touch

Traditional art form given new twist with the latest cinematic technology as project celebrates masterpieces, **Xu Fan** reports.

For more than two centuries, Peking Opera has mesmerized audiences with its captivating performances and stunning vocal artistry, earning it a place as one of China's most significant cultural treasures. To preserve and promote the iconic legacy, the Peking Opera Film Project, entering its 13th year, has released four cinematic remakes of classics.

The new movies — *Silang Visits His Mother*, *The Gathering of Heroes: Borrowing the East Wind*, *The You Sisters of the Red Chamber*, and *Cai Wenji Returns to Her Homeland* — were shown on April 25, a day after the China National Film Museum added them to its collection.

Ma Chongjie, a Beijing native and the nephew of the late Peking Opera master Ma Lianliang, was the director of the first two movies, which wrapped up shooting in 2018 and 2019 respectively.

Ma Chongjie, who learned opera as a child, shifted his interest to the film industry after graduating from the directing department of the Beijing Film Academy. He has worked as a director at the China Film Group Corp for more than 30 years, serving as helmsman for around 20 movies, most of which have been inspired by traditional operas or remakes of them.

"I was born into a family of Peking Opera performers, so I have had a special affection for this art form since childhood," says the veteran filmmaker, who has directed four of the 21 features so far produced by the Peking Opera Film Project.

With support from State authorities, the project has brought together masters and emerging talent from the country's top Peking Opera troupes, creatively blending modern cinematography with the centuries-old art form to appeal to younger audiences.

His third movie for the project — after *The Orphan of Zhao* and *Xie Yaohuan — Silang Visits His Mother* casts a group of established Peking Opera artists, such as actor Zhang Jianfeng and actress Dou Xiaoxuan, to retell a legend set during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).

The tale, which originated in the 16th century, tells the story of Yang Yanhui, nicknamed Silang, the fourth son of a renowned general. He is captured and forced to marry the daughter of Empress Dowager Xiao, his enemy and a powerful ruler from the Liao Dynasty (916-1125). Fifteen years later, the protagonist discovers that his long-separated mother has succeeded his late father as the new leader of a Northern Song army, so he decides to risk his life and escape the Liao palace to reunite with his family.

"The play is one of the earliest Peking Opera classics and has been staged many times over the past century, with most Peking Opera masters putting their own unique spin on it. When I was first tasked with directing this movie, I felt quite stressed," recalls Ma Chongjie.

On the project, which took an excess of eight months to complete, the director used advanced filming techniques, such as virtual cinematography, to combine traditional stage performance with special effects. In doing so, he brought to life this ancient tale, which also touches on themes of wartime romance.

"Usually, die-hard fans who often visit opera theaters primarily listen to their favorite plays, rather than watch them, as they are already familiar with the lyrics and lines," says Ma Chongjie. "By using visual effects to fill in the gaps in the imagination, these Peking Opera movies will draw more attention to the settings and close-ups, adding another layer of significance."

In some of his other films based on Peking Opera classics, such as *The Gathering of Heroes: Borrowing the East Wind*, visual effects have also played a significant role.

Adapted from the classic novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, written by Luo Guanzhong in the 14th century, the film weaves together the tales of how Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang, two military strategists from allied powers engaged in the wars following the collapse of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), defeat their enemies during a decisive battle in Chibi, located in what is now Central China's Hubei province.

According to Ma Chongjie, the movie uses computer-generated imagery to bring to life various battlefield scenes, ranging from the surging waters of the Yangtze River to an onslaught with thousands of arrows.

Ma Chongjie regards the movie — with its sprinkling of prestigious artists aged between 60 and 84 — as the most challenging undertaking of his directorial career.

"This play has been passed down for more than 200 years, encapsulating the artistic contributions of many different masters from various schools. In 1957, it was adapted into a movie, featuring seven masters of that era," explains Ma Chongjie, emphasizing the pressure of seeking breakthroughs while retaining traditional nuances.

Although most Peking Opera tales tell stories of royalty and high-ranking officials, *The You Sisters of the Red Chamber*, created by the late master Xun Huisheng in 1932, shifts the focus to two ordinary women and their everyday struggles.

With veteran Peking Opera artist Liu Changyu, 81, serving as the movie's art consultant, the film retells a well-known story from the classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, written by Cao Xueqin of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), about two beautiful sisters surnamed You who struggle to pursue love but both face tragedy.

Liu, who started to learn Peking Opera at 9 in 1951, says that she has repeatedly studied the classic novel and the movie script in great detail, in order to explore the experiences of women during feudal times.

"Most Peking Opera stories draw upon traditional Chinese culture and reflect the unique values, aesthetics and moral pursuits of the Chinese nation," says Liu. "Through film, we can better pass on the art of Peking Opera and allow more people, including locals in far-flung rural areas and Chinese soldiers guarding the borders, to experience it."

Contact the writer at xufan@chinadaily.com.cn

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A French connection

Interactive dance drama *Mobius*, jointly created by students and faculty of institutions in Beijing and Lyon, builds a unique bridge between artists and the audience, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

Upon arriving at the venue, it was almost difficult for members of the audience to tell when or where the performance began — there was no seating in the dimly lit space, and people dressed in futuristic costumes walked mechanically among them or simply did their own thing.

At that moment of wonder and bewilderment, perhaps only the projections on the wall, showing the name of the performance, *Mobius*, could reassure them that they had arrived at the right place.

When the show actually began, the audience members could choose where they viewed the performance — stand in the corner of the hall, lean on the banisters upstairs, or walk around following the particular performers they'd like to watch.

The immersive dance performance, *Mobius*, debuted at the CHAO Bridge Space in Beijing on April 22 as part of the 17th edition of Festival Croisements, an annual event of cultural exchanges between China and France.

This production is also a collaborative project between the two countries, jointly created by the School of Arts and Communication at Beijing Normal University and the Lyon National High Conservatory of Music and Dance in France.

"I prefer to see it as an artistic action rather than just a theater performance or a show," says Xiao Xiangrong, dean of the School of Arts and Communication, who is the project's cofounder and artistic director.

"It is open-ended. Only when the audience attends and participates in the performance, and interpersonal communication is established, can we say that our creative vision is fulfilled."

Diverting from the conventional idea that the audience is merely a viewer of the creators' works, according to Xiao, in this contemporary project, the audience plays a part along with the creators.

In one scene, for example, the dancers are holding mobile phones and filming one another, with the footage projected live on the wall. A lot of the viewers film the dancers, but what they do not know is that a camera is recording them doing so.

"In the end we will produce a video, that will truly complete the work. That's why I consider it an artistic action that achieves people-to-people interaction," Xiao adds.

Dai Jian, another cofounder of the project and an associate professor from the Beijing school, says that the title comes from the founders' thoughts about the relationship between people and technology.

Initially agreeing to present an intercultural exchange, the creators decided to zoom in on the changes of life brought by the universal experiences of facing technological advances.

"Technological development has made people's lives much more convenient, but it has also complicated our lives. We probably need to learn a new skill every month to keep up with the times, we might become more greedy or competitive, and other issues have arisen such as environmental damage," Dai says.

"The information society has two sides. Our pursuit of progress is also restricting or stifling us. One day, Xiao proposed the concept of the Mobius strip, which can concretely demonstrate the transition between the positive and negative aspects of a cycle."

Consisting of three parts — order, manipulation and celebration — the production aims to present humans moving between reality and the virtual world, and inspires the audience to reflect on its relationship with artificial entities such as manufacturing, technology and information.

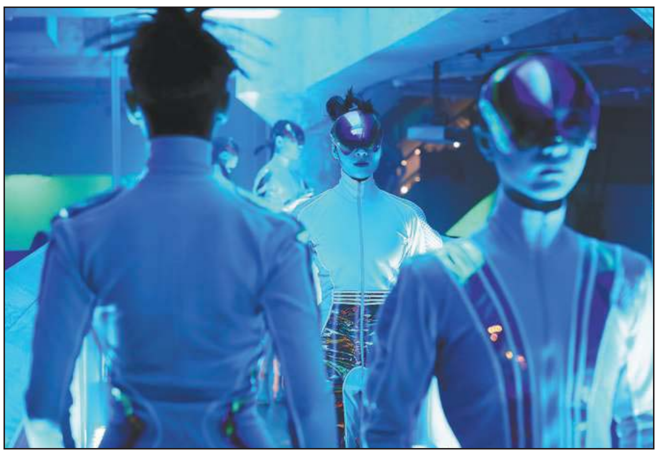
The collaborations between the two institutions began in 2014, when representatives from Beijing Normal University visited the French conservatory. In 2019, the institutions made a plan to deepen exchanges among their students and teachers, and jointly produce cross-cultural works.

The institutions have since been exploring ways to cooperate in various aspects, including curricula, seminars, workshops and artistic creation. Over the past two years, teachers and students from both institutions cocreated the production and rehearsed online.

"In this production, one can see the beautiful and precise body language of dancers, but also the casual or even flashy movements often seen in clubs or on social media. We have incorporated all these different types of body language because they present a diverse picture of contemporary culture," Dai says.

"Modern dance is not just a genre with a specific body language. It is a sense of open-mindedness, inclusiveness, catharsis and individual choice. We are exploring ways to give more space to the performers and the audience."

Contact the writer at chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn



The immersive dance performance *Mobius* is staged at the CHAO Bridge Space in Beijing. The production adopts futuristic outfits to present the relationship between people and technology.

The main production members and performers of *Mobius*. PHOTOS BY FU XIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Selfless villager sees the wood from the trees

GUIYANG — At dawn every morning, after breakfast, Xiao Tikui sets off to patrol a forest of more than 1,333 hectares, covering the rolling mountains of Southwest China's Guizhou province.

"Increasing vegetation coverage has brought tremendous changes to nearby villages," says the forest ranger, 68, who hails from Guizhou's Xiaxi village.

"In the past, floods would roll down the bare mountains carrying sand and mud when it rained heavily, washing away the farmlands at the foot of the mountains and resulting in serious soil erosion," Xiao says.

In 1984, China introduced a policy allowing farmers to contract out the long-term management of barren hills and beaches. In the same year, when Xiao was 29, he contracted about 100 hectares of barren mountain land in the village and began to plant trees.

"I just wanted to do something for my hometown and save the farmland from being destroyed," he says.

The first milestone came in 1994, by which time Xiao had spent 10 years planting trees across the once barren hills.

> "I knew it was difficult to make a forest by myself. Only by mobilizing other villagers can more of the wasteland on the mountains be dressed in green."
>
> **Xiao Tikui,** forest ranger in Guizhou province

"I was more than proud seeing the trees," he says. "However, I knew it was difficult to make a forest by myself. Only by mobilizing other villagers can more of the wasteland on the mountains be dressed in green."

To gather more people to his afforestation cause, Xiao went door-to-door, persuading more residents to join the campaign. It wasn't long before trees gradually covered the mountain slopes.

As saplings grew taller and thicker, Xiao became a volunteer forest ranger. He built a shed approximately 5 kilometers from his home, living there from September to May each year, during the hay season.

In 1999, Xiao was hired by the local government as a forest ranger, responsible for protecting the mountain forests that he and other villagers had planted.

To increase efficiency in his work, in 2013, Xiao and his wife went to live in the mountains full-time, walking more than 20 km every day during his forest patrols.

He says that making a life in the mountains is easier and more convenient than it used to be, as the local power department has set up a special electricity line for the couple.

At about 6 pm every day, Xiao returns home from his patrol and sits on the bench in front of his house. Rolling up his trouser legs, several scars are clearly visible. During his 39 years of afforestation work and his efforts to protect the mountains, Xiao suffered six fractures.

"I've worn out hundreds of pairs of shoes from walking in the mountains over the years," he says. "I have to buy at least two or three pairs of shoes at a time, and the shoe sellers are always happy when they see me."

Xiao says that his children currently work in big cities, and when he retires, he would like to ask them to return to the village and continue his work.

Looking at the tree-lined hills in the distance and recalling the past, Xiao says he feels all sorts of emotions in his heart.

"Floods pulling down mud during heavy rains have not been seen for more than 20 years."

XINHUA

The poetic fruits of success

Writers of today celebrate rich and ancient literary heritage of Huangyan, **Xing Wen** reports.

Above: An aerial view of Huangyan district, Taizhou city, Zhejiang province, known as the hometown of Chinese honey oranges. **Top left:** Oranges hang temptingly at a production base in Huangyan. **Top right:** A town in Huangyan retains its ancient appeal.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Left: Contemporary literati share their views on how to depict rural areas in modern times in a salon held in Huangyan district. **Right:** Yi ethnic group poet Jidi Majia (center), former president of the China Writers Association, at a museum in Huangyan during a recent field trip. PHOTOS BY KE GUOYING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Patriotic Chinese poet Qu Yuan from the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) once wrote *Ju Song*, or Ode to the Orange Tree, praising the grace and beauty of an orange tree in southern China.

This literary masterpiece shows Chinese people's pursuit of beauty and virtue, and cements the symbolic significance of oranges in classical Chinese literature.

More than two millennia later, a group of contemporary poets and writers visited Huangyan district in Taizhou, East China's Zhejiang province, widely hailed as the hometown of Chinese honey oranges.

Amid the large stretch of orange groves there, they retraced the literary heritage of ancient literati who celebrated the allure of the scented fruit.

With an enriched vocabulary and refined sentence structure, these modern-day literati continue the tradition of poetic adulation for this cherished symbol of beauty and good fortune.

A poetry recitation, singing, and dance performance centered around promoting orange culture took place on the night of May 5 at an orange production base in Huangyan, where the luminous moonbeams caress the water of Yongning River, serenaded by the soothing melody of croaking frogs in the orange groves. The aroma of orange flowers intermingles with the moist air of the coastal area, giving rise to a poetic ambience. Together, these elements are likely to weave a tapestry of literary inspiration that envelops the senses of those present.

The event also kicked off a three-day field trip for a group of well-known writers and poets from across the country to explore the rural areas of Huangyan.

Yi ethnic group poet Jidi Majia, also former vice-president of the China Writers Association, encourages poets and writers to capture touching daily moments of local people and personally experience the vitality of the countryside, where livelihoods and ecology have been remarkably improved.

"I hope that more literary works could be created to promote orange culture in Huangyan, further arousing people's love for nature and the pursuit of a natural lifestyle, and stimulating the inherent driving force of rural spiritual and cultural development," he says.

He also expresses his hope to develop the gathering into an international event. "There are many regions in the world that are known for producing citrus fruits, and there are also many poets and writers who have a spiritual connection with oranges, orange trees, orange blossoms, and orange groves. I believe that Huangyan has the potential to host an international poetry event with an orange theme."

Huangyan has been growing honey oranges for more than 1,700 years. It has been making efforts to leverage high-tech facilities and agricultural talents as key drivers for revitalizing and developing its orange cultivation. To this end, Huangyan has collaborated with the Huazhong Agricultural University, the citrus research institute in Southwest University, Zhejiang Citrus Research Institute, and Zhejiang University, with plans to bring in over 100 experts to work in Huangyan.

"Such planting facilities as intelligent greenhouses have shown us the amazing transformation of citrus cultivation from relying on weather conditions to working with knowledge of the weather. The change provides us with rich creative materials for literary creation," says essayist Mai Ge.

During the field trip, the group of literati visited ancient villages, city parks, historic sites, and wetlands, which gave them a glimpse into the transformation of Huangyan's countryside and its achievements in ecological conservation.

Author Feng Qiuzi suggests that fellow writers and poets should approach nature with reverence and seek to connect with it by returning to their hometown or exploring the countryside.

"We should rely on our instinctual senses to listen, understand, and appreciate natural sounds. In doing so, we can uncover the secrets of the land and humanity, as well as explore the profound spiritual realm," she says.

Jiang Zi, a winner of the prestigious Lu Xun Literature Award last year, adds that rural areas serve as a crucial point for every Chinese writer to ponder upon the world.

"Today, with a global outlook in mind, the modernization of China's countryside and rural lifestyle will present new prospects for our literary creations themed on rural areas," he says.

Along with the aforementioned event, Huangyan will host a series of events, including a contemporary poetry art exhibition, poetry concerts, reader meet-and-greets and literary lover salons, in the following month.

Contact the writer at xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn

Book looks at early pre-Qin social rituals

By WANG RU
wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn

Four books launched as major academic findings by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing on May 5, including *Classics and Their Meaning: Evolution of Li and Early Confucianism* (right), a book on the study of *li* (ritual) and early Confucianism.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Liji, or The Book of Rites, a collection of texts about rituals before the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), which also shows the philosophical, educational, political and aesthetic ideas of the time, is an ancient classic of early Confucianism. But since the texts were disorderly, they didn't attract much attention of researchers until more records about them were unearthed from archaeological excavations in recent years, according to Liu Feng, a researcher with the Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

He is the author of a book on the collection, *Classics and Their Meaning: Evolution of Li and Early Confucianism*, which was recently published by the China Social Sciences Press, and released in Beijing on May 5.

Liu has studied *li* (ritual) and Confucianism for more than two decades.

According to him, early Confucianism refers to that which was popular before the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), especially the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).

"*Li* is a very important issue stressed in early Confucianism. … It promotes the development of early Confucianism. The study of *Liji* can help make clear the process of how early Confucianism developed and became divided," says Liu.

He also mentions *li* lies at the core of Chinese culture and a social system that originated from the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC) with regulations on ritual and music to strengthen people's concept of hierarchy and thus maintain social order.

The book mainly discusses the issue from four perspectives, including the development of Confucian thought in the Warring States Period and the construction of early Confucian political philosophy.

It also covers the formation of the early Confucian philosophy of history and the integration of *li* into the society of the Warring States Period.

"*Liji* not only plays a significant role in our study of early Confucianism, but also offers us some influential ideas in traditional Chinese culture, like 'when the Grand Course is pursued, a public and common spirit rules all under the sky', and 'acting in good faith and being friendly to others'," says Liu.

He also mentions that China's traditional philosophical ideas, such as pursuing harmony between people and nature, the people as the foundation of a state, and governing on the basis of virtues, are fully discussed in *Liji*.

"In-depth research on the collection unveils the rich connotations contained in it, and is significant for spreading the traditional culture of China," he adds.

The book was promoted with three other books as major academic results of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in May. According to Gao Peiyong, deputy director of the academy, he hopes the books can help build an academic system of philosophical and social sciences with Chinese characteristics.

Translating classics a story of endeavor

Translator Yang Wuneng talks to young readers about *Grimm's Fairy Tales* at an activity organized by Chongqing Library. XINHUA

CHONGQING — From *Grimm's Fairy Tales* to *Magic Mountain*, from *The Sorrows of Young Werther* to *Siddhartha*, Yang Wuneng has translated more than 30 German classics into Chinese and boasts millions of readers in China. At 85, he is determined to stay healthy and live longer for the career he loves.

"I slept six hours last night, including two hours of deep sleep," said Yang, as he showed his smartwatch during an interview earlier in April, adding that he had not slept that long for years.

He became a celebrity in China last year after a documentary about his work went viral on Bilibili, one of the country's largest online video platforms. It has renewed Chinese readers' interest in German literature and many avid young readers who grew up reading Yang's translation of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* are now reading his *Magic Mountain* and *Narcissus and Goldmund*.

Yang translated *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in 1981, when he was studying for a master's degree in Beijing. More than 1 million copies have been sold since and the book served as a source of literary enlightenment for many Chinese readers.

Born into a worker's family in Southwest China's Chongqing, Yang said he became a translator by chance. In his younger days, he dreamed of becoming an electrical engineer, but was denied entry into a polytechnic university because he was colorblind. In 1957, he entered Nanjing University in East China's Jiangsu province to study German, and began translating German essays and stories for local newspapers to support his family with the earnings.

In this way, he embarked on a literary translation career that was to last more than 60 years.

He continued his studies in Germany, spending decades translating and retranslating German classics and winning many awards, including the German Federal Cross of Merit and Goethe Medal.

This year, 22 volumes of Yang's translations of German literary classics will be published.

Yang compared his career as a translator to "running uphill", something he enjoys doing due to the geographical conditions of his home city of Chongqing. He spent 20 years translating *Magic Mountain*, which, to him, was like an exploration of a unique and amazing new world. "This enabled me to observe myself and the world with a new vision, and I would say that's the most charming part of being a translator."

Yang loves communicating with his readers by telling the stories behind the works through his account on the social media platform WeChat, as well as at cultural events hosted by local libraries.

"One eye is full of tears and the other, of laughter … Yet with only one heart, how can I hold two lands, and twice my nostalgia?" he wrote in a poem in fond memory of Germany, which is like his second home.

XINHUA

SPORTS

OLYMPICS

Raising the stakes in winter sports medal quest

Team China urged to build on Beijing 2022 breakthroughs as 1,000-day countdown to Milan Games kicks off

By SUN XIAOCHEN
sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

Fresh from delivering the nation's best-ever Winter Olympic campaign at home, China's winter sports teams are refusing to rest on their laurels as they target more glory at the 2026 Games.

A mobilization meeting in Beijing on Saturday kicked off the 1,000-day countdown to the Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo Games, with motivational speeches from Olympic champions, coaches and sports officials underlining China's ambitions for more breakthroughs across a wider range of events in Italy.

Despite achieving a best-ever medal haul at the home Games last year, China still has a long way to go to become an all-around powerhouse in winter sports, stressed sports minister Gao Zhidan.

"Our overall competitiveness in winter sports is not strong enough, and the same can be said for the depth of our reserve talent in many sports. It's a big challenge for us to improve our performances in 2026," said Gao, who was appointed minister of the General Administration of Sport of China in August last year.

"We have to prove to the world that the success of Beijing 2022 wasn't a one-off, that we remain committed to the sustainable development of winter sports and have changed the landscape of international ice and snow sports."

Maintaining China's traditional strength in skating events and making solid progress in snow sports such as snowboarding and freestyle skiing, the host delegation bagged 15 medals, including nine gold, at Beijing 2022. That was China's best result since making its Winter Olympic debut at the 1980 edition in Lake Placid, New York.

Beijing 2022's success triggered massive public interest in winter sports nationwide. Over 346 million Chinese people participating in ice and snow activities in the build-up to the Games, earning high praise from the International Olympic Committee.

Now it's time to build on that legacy even further, urged Ni Huizhong, director of the National Winter Sports Administrative Center.

"We cannot dwell on the success of Beijing 2022 and past glories," said Ni.

From left: Olympic champions Qi Guangpu, Liu Shaoang, Sandor Liu Shaolin and Sui Wenjing attend an event in Beijing on Saturday to mark the 1,000-day countdown to the 2026 Winter Games. XINHUA

"There is still so much untapped potential, more events to improve and invest in, and more problems to solve concerning the further development of our winter sports.

"The progress of youth development in some of our strength events remains slow. We still rely heavily on foreign coaching in most of the snow sports and we are far from being competitive on the world stage in more mainstream events such as cross-country, biathlon and Alpine skiing.

"There are gaps between us and the world's winter sports powers which we need to keep working on with consistent effort and unwavering commitment."

With a number of veteran athletes taking a break from competition this past season, the lackluster performances of China's figure skating and freestyle skiing aerials teams — two of the host's much successful programs at Beijing 2022 — highlighted the lack of youth development in these sports, Ni stressed.

Talent boost

During the 2022-23 season, China's winter sports teams won 14 gold medals in total at world championships and World Cup series — almost equaling the outcome of the 2018-19 season, the first year of the Beijing 2022 Olympic cycle, according to the administrative center.

As the country's most decorated winter sports program, the short-track speed skating team, led by new coach Zhang Jing, remains the biggest contributor after winning 19 medals, including six gold, this past season.

China's short-track medal hopes have been further enhanced by the additions of Hungarian-born Olympic champion brothers Sandor Liu Shaolin and Liu Shaoang, who completed a naturalization process in March.

The Liu brothers are the latest talents to be recruited as part of a program initiated prior to Beijing 2022 to bolster the country's competitiveness in winter sports, especially in less-developed events.

Former South Korean national team short-track speed skater Lin Xiaojun, aka Lim Hyo-jun, completed his first international season representing China after changing nationality in 2021 to resume his career following a long-term dispute with the Korean governing body. In a strong return to competition, Lin won back-to-back 500m gold medals at the short-track World Cup series in February.

With China opening its borders in the post-pandemic era, a packed schedule of international events on the 2023-24 calendar will provide Chinese athletes with more elite-level tests at home.

The International Skating Union's long-track and short-track speed skating World Cup legs, scheduled respectively for Nov 17-19 and Dec 8-10, and the figure skating grand prix final, planned for Dec 7-10, are among the international events already confirmed.

Ji Dong, coach of the national freestyle skiing aerials team, welcomed the return of international tests and pledged to take full advantage of Beijing 2022's legacy to maintain the momentum in Italy.

"It sounds quite far away, but there are actually only two more winters until the Olympic season opens in 2025," said Ji, who helped Xu Mengtao and Qi Guangpu finish on top of the women's and men's podiums at Beijing 2022 in aerials.

"The clock is ticking and it's really a very tight window considering we are playing catchup to our rivals."

BASKETBALL

Tatum explodes to shatter Sixers

BOSTON — Jayson Tatum gave Boston a long-overdue fast start and followed it up with a finish the NBA had never seen before.

After struggling in back-to-back games, Tatum erupted for 51 points — the most in a Game 7 in NBA history — and the Celtics beat the Philadelphia 76ers 112-88 on Sunday to advance to the Eastern Conference finals for the second straight year.

One game after missing 14 of his first 15 shots only to awaken in the fourth quarter in time to save their season, Tatum scored 25 in the back-and-forth first half and 17 more in Boston's 33-10 third quarter that turned a three-point lead into a runaway.

The Celtics, who lost to the Golden State Warriors in the NBA Finals last year, will face the Miami Heat in the East finals for the second straight season. Game 1 is on Wednesday in Boston.

"I was relieved just to get another chance. Our season could have been over after Game 6," said Tatum, who broke the Game 7 record of 50 points Stephen Curry set two weeks ago.

"It definitely was on my mind that I had played as bad as it could get, for 43 minutes. We had a saying: 'It's only up from here.'"

Tatum added 13 rebounds and Jaylen Brown scored 25 points for Boston, which rallied from a 3-2 deficit in the series to keep alive their hopes for an unprecedented 18th NBA championship.

"You always come into a series with the expectation of how it's supposed to go," said Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla, who is in his first year as an NBA head coach after being promoted on the eve of training camp after Ime Udoka was suspended. "That's not how the playoffs are."

Tatum was subbed out of the game with three minutes left to a standing ovation from the crowd, which soon broke out in a "Beat the Heat!" chant. Miami beat Boston in six games in the 2020 East finals and the Celtics took a seven-game matchup last season.

"It's the best time of the year," Tatum said. "As a competitor, I love the opportunity."

Newly crowned NBA MVP Joel Embiid scored 15 points on 5-for-18 shooting, and Tobias Harris scored 19 for Philadelphia. The Sixers lost in the conference semifinals for the third straight year, and the fifth time in six seasons; they have not gotten any farther since reaching the NBA Finals in 2001 despite "The Process" — tanking their way to four top-three draft picks in a row, including Embiid.

"I thought we had the right group. I really did," said Sixers coach Doc Rivers, who was on the Boston bench when the Celtics won it all in 2008. "We played great all year and this loss absolutely diminishes what we did this year in some way. I think this team is headed right. I thought we took another step this season. And then tonight I think we took a step backward. But that's OK. That happens, too."

Tatum started 0 for 6 in a Game 5 loss and missed 14 of his first 15 shots overall from the floor in Game 6 before making four 3-pointers in the final 4:14 to force the decisive seventh game.

He picked up where he left off, scoring Boston's first basket and 11 points in the first quarter, 14 more in the second and out-scoring the Sixers on his own, 17-10, in the third. The 33-10 edge in the third was the most lopsided quarter in a Game 7 since at least 1997.

"JT just got it going and get out of that man's way," Brown said. "He got it rolling, and there's nothing they could do to stop him."

Banged-up Brown

Brown began the game with the black mask he has worn since breaking a bone in his face before the All-Star break. He took it off and soon absorbed an elbow to the face from James Harden, who was assessed a flagrant foul.

Brown continued without the mask but finished the half with cotton in his left nostril. He also played with an edge, making both foul shots and following it with a steal and layup as Boston went on a 9-0 run to erase a 35-26 deficit.

Brown also dove into the Sixers bench to save a ball, then had words with the bench after Georges Niang grabbed his leg and kept him from getting back on the court. Both players were given technical fouls.

Robert Williams followed the commotion with a layup that tied the score at 35-all. "Nothing like a shot to the face to wake you right up," Brown said.

What's up, Doc?

Rivers is 6-10 in seventh games. The 10 defeats are five more than any other NBA coach and three more than the NHL's Mike Babcock and Bruce Boudreau.

Rivers' teams are 6-16 in their last 22 chances to close out an opponent in a playoff series.

Asked if he expected to be back next year, Rivers said: "Yeah. I think I got two years left. No one is safe in our business and I get that."

Harden also could be gone if the Sixers opt for an overhaul. He has the opportunity to become a free agent this offseason.

"We've got an unfinished job. We haven't won anything and I think we've got the chance to win," Embiid said. "We've got what it takes to win. ... I still believe me and him have the chance to win. But it's going to take more than us."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Jayson Tatum celebrates surpassing the 50-point mark against the Philadelphia 76ers during Game 7 of their Eastern Conference semifinal series at TD Garden on Sunday in Boston, Massachusetts. GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

Jaylen Brown reacts in disbelief after being called for a technical foul on Sunday. USA TODAY SPORTS VIA REUTERS CON

Philadelphia head coach Doc Rivers congratulates Boston's Jayson Tatum after the Celtics' playoff series victory. GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

Jayson expects sparks to fly in finals rematch against Miami

Four-time All-Star Jayson Tatum is savoring his Boston Celtics' upcoming Eastern Conference finals rematch against the Miami Heat, after stomping out the Philadelphia 76ers 112-88 with a record-breaking 51 points in Game 7.

The Celtics beat the Heat a year ago en route to the NBA Finals, where they lost to the Golden State Warriors. Tatum promised there would be fireworks when their rivalry with Miami continues this week.

"They make plays and they figure out a way to win games. It's going to be fun, it's going to be highly competitive," said Tatum. "As a competitor you just love the opportunity."

It will mark the third time the two teams have met in the conference finals in four seasons, after the Heat came out on top in 2020 before losing the championship series against the Los Angeles Lakers.

The Heat have enjoyed a charmed run as the first eighth seeds in nearly a quarter-century to reach the conference finals.

But Tatum's Sunday showstopper — with 13 rebounds, five assists and the most points ever in a Game 7 — surely sent a chill even through the balmy shores of South Beach.

"Being in another Game 7, being able to come back home in front of our fans, I was really excited for the moment," he told reporters.

Celtics head coach Joe Mazzulla said the performance was as much a credit to Tatum's physical skill as his mental toughness, after overcoming a sluggish start to Game 6 when the Sixers had them on the ropes.

"(Tatum is) just a guy who doesn't get too high or too low," said Mazzulla. "When you play like that and live like that, I think it works out for him ... he'll have the humility to just keep going."

REUTERS

SPORTS

SOCCER

BARCA BACK TO GLORY

Catalan giant secures first Spanish league title since Messi's departure

Barcelona players celebrate winning the club's 27th Spanish league championship following a 4-2 victory over local rival Espanyol at RCDE Stadium in Cornella de Llobregat on Sunday. It was the Catalan giant's first La Liga championship since 2019, with Robert Lewandowski scoring twice and Alejandro Balde and Jules Kounde also on the mark to ensure Barca wrested the title from Real Madrid. AFP

Barcelona is celebrating winning the Spanish league — and this time without Lionel Messi.

Barca lifted its first league trophy since Messi's departure with a 4-2 victory at local rival Espanyol on Sunday. Espanyol fans stormed the pitch at the end of the game and forced Barcelona players to flee for the locker room.

Robert Lewandowski scored twice to lead the Catalan club to its first league title since 2019. The title was secured with four matches remaining and two years after Messi left amid the club's financial struggles.

The last time Barcelona had celebrated a league title without Messi in its squad was back in 1998-99. He came into the first team in 2004-05 and won the title that season.

Celebrations on the field were short-lived on Sunday as players had to rush to the locker room after a large group of Espanyol fans from the ultra section behind one of the goals started running toward Barcelona players who were singing and celebrating in the center of the pitch. Security guards quickly intervened but riot police had to stand in front of the tunnel's entrance to prevent the fans from going in. The supporters threw chairs and other objects.

Alejandro Balde and Jules Kounde also scored for Barcelona, which now has 27 league titles, eight fewer than Real Madrid. Third-place Atletico Madrid is 16 points back after losing 1-0 at last-place Elche earlier on Sunday.

The victory over city rival Espanyol gave Barcelona an insurmountable 85 points from 34 matches, 14 points more than Madrid, which won 1-0 at Getafe on Saturday.

Barcelona has led since the 13th round and boasts the league's best defense with 13 goals conceded — 14 better than any other club. It also has 25 clean sheets.

"It's a magnificent feeling, a feeling of job well done," Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez said. "This is important to give the club's project some stability. The league title shows that things have been done the right way and that we have to stay on this path.

"We are left with a magnificent feeling, more than 10 months of work, of sacrifice. It has been an extraordinary job," Xavi added.

"For the fans, for the club, winning it was vital for the stability of the project, we must continue on this path. This league (title) means that we are doing things very well, this gives us stability, although we still have the unfinished business of European competition."

> "This is important to give the club's project some stability. The league title shows that things have been done the right way and that we have to stay on this path."
>
> **Xavi Hernandez,**
> Barcelona head coach

Barcelona won eight league titles in 11 seasons through 2019. It finished second to Madrid in 2020, then third — behind Madrid and champion Atletico — in 2021. It was second to Madrid last season.

Barcelona's first title without Messi came in the Spanish Super Cup in January.

The club was yet to win a major trophy since president Joan Laporta took action to restructure its debt and revamp the squad with players like Lewandowski, Jules Kounde and Raphinha. Laporta celebrated with the players in the locker room.

Xavi said he had felt the pressure and was glad of the support from his family.

"I thought about my wife, my parents, my brothers and sisters... the staff, who have suffered a lot, those who never fail," Xavi said.

"We are in Spain and here criticism is normal, it happened to me when I was a player, but I am very stubborn and in the end the reward comes when there is good work."

Lewandowski opened the scoring on Sunday from close range in the 11th minute after a cross by Alejandro Balde. The 19-year-old added to the lead nine minutes later off a pass by Pedri, scoring his first league goal with the club.

Lewandowski, the league's leading scorer with 21 goals, added his second in the 40th after a low cross by Raphinha in a breakaway. Kounde scored the fourth in the 53rd with a header after a long pass by Frenkie de Jong. It was also his first league goal with the club.

The loss dealt a big blow to Espanyol in its fight against relegation. It stayed second-to-last, four points from safety.

Espanyol had won only once in its last 10 league matches, with a draw and eight losses. It was relegated in 2020 for the first time in nearly three decades, returning to the top flight in its first attempt as second-division champion.

Javi Puado scored Espanyol's first goal in the 73rd and Joselu added the second in stoppage time as Barcelona players were getting ready to celebrate.

It was the 32nd title with Barcelona for midfielder Sergio Busquets, who is leaving the club at the end of the season.

"I wanted to leave by winning an important title like the Spanish league and I'm happy that I was able to do it," he said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Efficiency outweighs flair in Xavi's winning formula

Barcelona secured the Spanish La Liga title for the first time since 2019 on Sunday.

The Catalan giant invested heavily last summer, sacrificing future income in order to bolster the squad and earn major silverware quickly.

Xavi Hernandez's side beat Real Madrid to win the Spanish Super Cup in January and clinched the league title by thrashing Espanyol 4-2 on Sunday.

AFP Sport looks at the key ways Barcelona was able to earn its 27th domestic championship.

Robert Lewandowski's 21 league goals were crucial for Barca. AFP

Teenager Gavi reinvigorated Barca's midfield this season. REUTERS

Rock solid

Barcelona has been known over the years for its attacking flair, from Ronaldinho to Lionel Messi, but its triumph this season has been based on a mean defense.

Xavi's men have conceded only 13 goals in 34 games, far fewer than any other side.

Andreas Christensen arrived on a free transfer from Chelsea and has slotted in perfectly, while his centerback partner Ronald Araujo staked his claim to be considered one of the best defenders in the world.

Xavi allowed young dynamo Alejandro Balde to phase out veteran leftback Jordi Alba and Jules Kounde has played out of position at rightback to strengthen that area and create a pacy backline.

It is no coincidence that Barcelona's Champions League elimination happened with many defenders injured, when Xavi was forced to pick now-retired Gerard Pique and Marcos Alonso at the heart of defense.

Goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen has found confidence and form again, with Barcelona yet to concede at home from open play all season, bar an Araujo own-goal against Real Madrid.

The Catalans have kept 25 clean sheets so far this season. The all-time league record is 26, set by Deportivo La Coruna in 1993-94.

The Galician side and Atletico Madrid share the record for fewest goals conceded in a 38-game season, 18 — a figure Barcelona could now beat.

Lewandowski blitz

Barcelona signed Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski as its marquee summer arrival and the Polish forward hit the ground running.

He is La Liga's top scorer with 21 goals, many of which came in a superb run of form before the World Cup.

The 34-year-old netted 13 goals in an 11-match spell between August and October to send Barcelona into the break as league leader.

Lewandowski's double against Espanyol helped Barca seal its title triumph.

Consistency kings

Previous champion Madrid still considers itself one of the very best sides in the world — it is in the Champions League semifinals and won the Copa del Rey earlier in May after all.

However, Carlo Ancelotti's team could not keep up with Barcelona this season in what is known in Spain as "the competition of consistency".

Madrid smashed Barcelona 4-0 in the Copa del Rey semifinal second leg and on its day remains the country's best side, but Barcelona has proven more reliable more often, and opened up a vast points gap on its rival.

Karim Benzema's injury-hit season set Madrid back, and with the 37-year-old Luka Modric and the 33-year-old Toni Kroos both key figures in Barca's first-choice starting XI, playing at the same intensity in every game was hard to achieve.

Barcelona's Champions League and Europa League exits stung, but allowed Xavi's side to focus on conquering the top flight.

Teen titan

Despite Barcelona typically utilizing a 4-3-3 system, in January Xavi decided to start deploying Gavi as a left winger.

The 18-year-old Spain international often ventures inside to offer Barca a fourth man in midfield, giving the team a useful outlet to retain possession.

With that system it waltzed to victory against Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup and went on a seven-match winning streak in La Liga.

It saw fewer chances created for Lewandowski, explaining his lower output in the second half of the season, but gave Barca far more control in games.

Big-game shift

Under Barcelona's two prior coaches, Ronald Koeman and Quique Setien, it was unable to beat either of Spain's other two big sides, Real Madrid and Atletico, in La Liga.

Xavi changed that in his first few months in charge, and he managed it again this season.

The Catalans earned two wins over Atletico in the league and one against Real Madrid, as well as two loss.

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